EQUIPPING JUDICATORY LEADERS TO ENCOURAGE INNOVATIVE FORMS OF CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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by
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United Theological Seminary, 2025

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The context of this project is the Western NC Conference of the United Methodist Church. The problem present in the context is that judicatory leaders often unintentionally discourage innovative, contextual ministry. If leaders receive training to be permission-givers and encouragers, they will intentionally support innovative, contextual ministries. The duration of this project will be six weeks. Data will be collected utilizing pre-project and post-project surveys, group discussions, and journaling assignments. Because the leaders will participate in training to be permission-givers and encouragers, they will be more likely to support and encourage innovative, contextual ministry initiatives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been blessed with a career in ministry that has allowed me to explore multiple contexts and learn from some of the best leaders in the world. All who have helped me are too numerous to name, so the following expressions of gratitude do not represent even a tithe of those I am thankful for.

I begin by expressing my appreciation for the WNC Conference for the opportunity to perform this study. I am thankful for my cabinet friends and colleagues, Bishop Ken Carter, Amy Coles, Kim Ingram, Dawn Hand, David Christy, Jae Lee, Mark Ralls, Lory Beth Huffman, Sam Moore, Bev Coppley, and Beth Crissman, for their support and encouragement.

Thank you, Paul Nixon and Herb Sadler for giving me a start in fulltime ministry, and to Bishop Paul Leeland who saw something in me to lead beyond the local church. My covenant group friends, Dan Jackson, Mark Ogren, and Phil Schrader, helped me get through some tough times along the way. I am grateful for the friendship of David Smith (Go Gators!), Randall Smith, Lance Eiland, Rob Hutchinson, and Luke Edwards, all who helped me to cross various academic finish lines. I express deep appreciation for my parents, Dan and Luann Pezet, who have always valued education, and have loved and encouraged me along the way.

DEDICATION

To Cindy, my beloved wife and mostly behind-the-scenes ministry partner, who has given as much to my ministry as I have. You have proofread every single page I have written in the last 25 years, which can only be described as a labor of love. And to my sons, Daniel and Luke, thank you for sharing me with the academy for these years. You all bring me joy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BOD	The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems
FX	Fresh Expression
UMC	United Methodist Church
WNCC	Western North Carolina Conference

INTRODUCTION

The ways that Christians have expressed their faith in corporate worship have evolved over the centuries in response to changing contexts. There have been times and places when Christians worshiped in homes and other times when they worshiped in cathedrals. Hymns, music, and acts of worship have adapted over time to cultural contexts. Church leaders have navigated these kinds of changes throughout history, and leading through change is still a responsibility of church leaders today. In modern times, society has become more individualistic. The church has responded with innovative, contextual forms of church that look different from traditional expressions of church. This work explores how judicatory leaders relate to these "fresh expressions" of church.

The context of this project is the eight districts of the Western North Carolina Conference (WNCC) of the United Methodist Church (UMC) which covers 44 counties in the western half of North Carolina and includes all United Methodist Churches within that area.[1] The conference's judicatory leadership comprises a bishop, superintendents, conference staff, boards, and committees. These leaders are charged with guiding the church into an ever-changing future.

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (BOD) establishes the governance for this context and sets an expectation for judicatory leaders to lead in

[1] "Quick Stats," Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, accessed October 6, 2024, https://www.wnccumc.org/stats.

changing contexts. In a paragraph regarding the assessment of local churches, the BOD states that ". . . every congregation is located in a community in some type of transition,"[2] and requires churches to ". . . respond to the changes that are occurring in its surrounding community and to organize its mission and ministry accordingly." The superintendent is given the task of leading these conversations about change as the "chief missional strategist of the district"[3] and gives the superintendent responsibility for overseeing a process of assessing a local church.[4] These responsibilities of the BOD demonstrate that superintendents as judicatory leaders are responsible for leading change in the church.

Leading change is not a simple undertaking. It is easy for judicatory leadership to fall into the trap of inadvertently stifling creative ministry that would allow the church to adapt. Several factors exacerbate the problem of leadership being open to change. There is an institutional inertia that resists change. Most metrics reported and evaluated for success in the denomination are inwardly focused, counting the number of people who already have a relationship with the church, rather than focusing on establishing new relationships through creative ministry initiatives. Leaders may not feel comfortable interpreting old rules in a modern way or helping churches and pastors understand their role in creating contextual ministries outside the walls of the church. Local church members may be resistant to changes that they feel are disrespectful to God and/or tradition. Successful leaders of change must learn to navigate these and other forms of resistance.

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[2] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 154.

[3] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline,* 344.

[4] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline,* 154.

This study began with the hypothesis that intentional training for judicatory leaders will help them feel more positive about being permission-givers and encouragers of innovative ministry. Based on the research presented in the following sections, this hypothesis was tested via a series of training sessions. The training included biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary perspectives to help leaders be more open to new expressions of church that differ from traditional models. The Fresh Expressions of Church movement was presented as an example of a new model of ministry.

The following pages present the research and the project in detail. The first chapter explores part of my personal journey that connects me to this work. The second through fifth chapters present research on topics that will help leaders to be more open to new, contextual forms of church. This begins in the second chapter with an exegetical examination of Acts 11, specifically focusing on the actions of early church leaders. The third chapter explores innovative forms of church in fields or tents and how the greater church responded. Chapter four examines the characteristics of a missiological movement and compares these to characteristics of an contextual form of church called fresh expressions (FXs). The fifth chapter is a study of the secular discipline of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory to learn how effective leaders help organizations navigate change. The sixth chapter presents the project that tested whether training sessions could help leaders feel more open to encouraging and giving permission for new, innovative forms of church.

The project was a facilitated learning cohort of seven conference leaders from the WNC Conference of the UMC. The training included individual sessions based on the research found in the following chapters. The primary data collection for this project was

from feedback in the form of surveys given at the beginning and end of the project's six-week duration. The data demonstrated that participants had a more positive affect toward encouraging innovative, contextual forms of church than before. This conclusion indicated that a training of this type should be made available to judicatory leaders to help the church navigate the changing contexts of our society.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

I grew up in a United Methodist family that consistently emphasized weekly worship and participation in the church. While attending worship was an important part of my spiritual formation, the most meaningful moments of faith development in my life occurred beyond sanctuary worship. I experienced the love of Christ most deeply when I joined with others in settings beyond the traditional Sunday morning worship setting. This has looked different over the years. I have felt this sense of spiritual community in a high school youth group, a church basketball league, a Discipleship Bible Study, a Thursday morning covenant group, and a weekly Dungeons and Dragons group.

Being part of these kinds of spiritual communities has played a vital role in my faith journey. My life would not be the same without the relationships created through them. This has inspired me to help others experience the joy I have felt through belonging to a Christian community on a shared discipleship path. Everyone should be able to embark on a spiritual journey with a supportive, close-knit community. Sadly, our church is in decline, and many congregations tend to focus inwardly and resist new ministries that would reach new people.

My personal experience with the church deeply informs my work as the Superintendent of the Metro District in the WNC Conference of the UMC. I have come to believe that current church systems have unintentionally encouraged inward-focused

churches and have contributed to the decline of the church. Society has also had a hand in the church's decline as it has shifted to become more individualistic and has moved away from the church at its center. The United Methodist Church, along with other mainline denominations, has endured traumatic events over the past five years that have severely changed its makeup. The church needs to adapt and seek new ways to develop new faith communities. My role as superintendent can be used to encourage churches to be externally focused so that they can create these kinds of spiritual communities where new people may connect and grow in their faith. I propose that judicatory-level leaders should encourage new, contextual forms of church to increase vitality and health in the church.

Context

The context of this study is the Western North Carolina (WNC) Conference of the United Methodist Church, which has 164,011 members in 634 churches. The conference is an episcopal area of the church, meaning it is assigned a bishop who provides primary leadership oversight for all its churches. The conference is further divided into eight districts (see Figure 1). Each district has a superintendent, who is an extension of the office of the bishop. The bishop and her or his superintendents have significant authority in making decisions about how financial, property, and people resources (both lay and clergy) are allocated within the conference. They also serve as the interpreters of church rules for their areas. The conference employs ministry directors (e.g., Conference Treasurer, Director of Church Development, Director of Ministerial Services) who lead the conference in specific specialty areas. These judicatory leaders determine spiritual

practices for the conference and can influence, modify, or discourage ministries as they see fit.

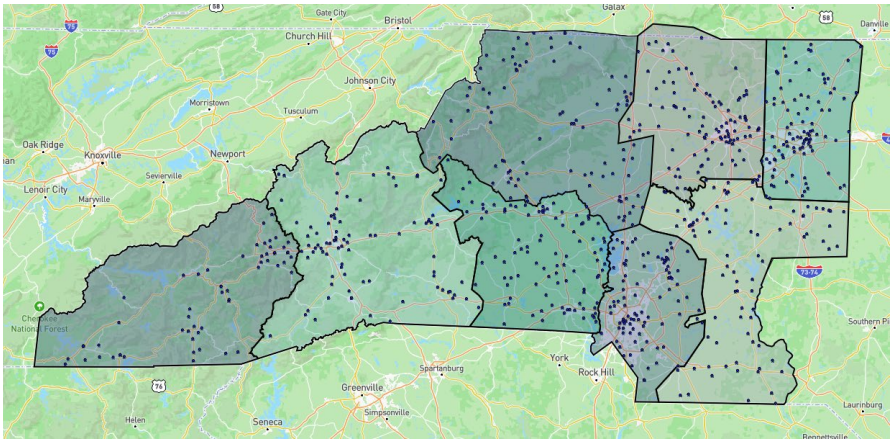

Figure 1. An illustration of the eight districts of the WNCC and the United Methodist churches within its area, created at https://missioninsite.com.

The total population of the 44 counties that make up the WNCC is 5,514,061.[1] This area is expected to grow by about 4% over the next ten years.[2] These residents are 68.6% White, 17.1% Black/African American, and 8.8% Hispanic or Latino.[3] The community will grow more diverse as the population increases. White residents will make up 3% less of the community, and Black/African American and Hispanic or Latino residents will increase by 1% each. While the general population of North Carolina has increased by 14% over the last 10 years,[4] the membership in WNCC churches has declined.[5]

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[1] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report," accessed October 6, 2024, https://www.missioninsite.com.

[2] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[3] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[4] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[5] "Custom Report," Ezra Data Management System, accessed November 11, 2022, https://ezra.gcfa.org/Statistics/Default.aspx.

The most populous district of the conference is the Metro District. The Methodist Movement in the Metro District began with humble roots in the 1800s and has grown into its current area, spanning five counties and anchored by the metropolitan city of Charlotte, North Carolina. Today, the Metro District consists of 66 United Methodist Churches.[6] The general population in the district is currently 1,714,593.[7] This represents a 72% increase from the total population in 2000, which was 995,444.[8] The district population is projected to continue growing at a rate of six percent each year over the next five years and, at that rate, surpass two million by 2035.[9]

One overarching theme of churches in the WNCC (and across the United States) is decline. While there are individual churches that have experienced growth, the data indicates an overall decline in the key metrics that the church uses to identify vitality. Total membership in Metro District churches, for example, declined from 69,278 in 2011 to 66,990 in 2019,[10] or a net loss of 2,288 members. Total average weekly worship declined from 29,869 to 25,794 over the same period, for a net loss of 4,075.[11] The number of professions of faith went from 1,395 to 1,019.[12] Total persons baptized (including children because the church did not track data separately for children and

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[6] Western North Carolina Conference, "Quick Stats."

[7] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[8] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[9] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[10] For the Metro District context, it is best to evaluate change between 2011 and 2019. 2011 was the year the district was formed, and 2019 was the last statistical year before COVID-19 skewed attendance figures (churches were inconsistent about reporting numbers of online worship participants).

[11] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

[12] Mission Insite, "Custom Quick Insite Report."

adults in 2011) declined from 852 to 589, or a reduction of 263 persons baptized per year.[13] These trends of decline hold true for other districts as well as most of the United States over the same period of time.[14]

Comparing the growth of the community to the decline of the church reveals the striking fact that the decline of the church is much more severe than people realize. The population in the district has grown by 72% since 2011, and in that same time, average worship attendance has declined by 14%. With such an influx of people into the district, one would think that our churches would naturally increase in size, yet this has not been the case. Taking this into consideration, it is apparent that the church is missing the mark of reaching new people in the community.

The data presented above gives a sense of decline through 2019. Since then, at least two major events have exacerbated the decline of the church in the United States in the last two years. The first was the COVID-19 pandemic.[15] The COVID virus was first confirmed in the United States on January 20th, 2020.[16] The virus spread and began to overwhelm medical resources in states like New York and California by March, and states began issuing stay-at-home orders across the nation.[17] Governer Roy Cooper issued a stay-at-home order that went into effect on March 30, 2020.[18] This order limited

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[13] Ezra Data Management System, "Custom Report."

[14] Ezra Data Management System, "Custom Report."

[15] "CDC Museum COVID-19 Timeline," Center for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed November 11, 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/museum/timeline/covid19.html

[16] Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID-19 Timeline."

[17] Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID-19 Timeline."

[18] "Executive Order No. 121," North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, March 27, 2020, www.ncdhhs.gov/eo121-stay-home-order-3pdf/download?attachment.

gatherings of more than ten persons, which restricted worship in churches across the state.[19] By June, there were 2 million cases in the United States.[20]

The WNCC acted before the state, by suspending worship for two weeks beginning March 12, 2020.[21] At the end of that two-week period, the suspension of worship was extended "until further notice."[22] The WNCC quickly adapted and offered churches several resources to help congregations worship and gather online, including offering free Zoom accounts and grants for video equipment to help churches take their worship to the Internet.[23] These solutions became even more important as the suspension of worship moved from two weeks to a full year. In March 2024, the WNCC announced an easing of the suspension of worship for counties that were not being affected by the pandemic, and churches would begin returning to their sanctuaries for in-person worship over the next six months.[24] After not being in person for worship for more than a year, most churches did not return to worship with the same number of people that they had before the pandemic.

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[19] North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, "Executive Order No. 121."

[20] Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "COVID-19 Timeline."

[21] "COVID-19: Update from Bishop Leeland and Other Resources for Preparedness," The Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, accessed November 22, 2022, https://www.wnccumc.org/newsdetail/covid-19-letter-from-bishop-leeland-and-other-resources-for-preparedness-13441434.

[22] The WNCC, "Covid-19: Update."

[23] "Church Development Offers Assistance for Streaming Worship," The Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, March 12, 2020, https://www.wnccumc.org/newsdetail/church-development-offers-assistance-for-streaming-worship-13441647.

[24] "COVID-19 Guidelines for In-Person Worship & Ministry - UPDATED 3.24.21," The Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, March 24, 2021, https://www.wnccumc.org/newsdetail/covid-19-guidelines-for-in-person-worship-ministry-updated-3-24-21-15181215.

The second major event to affect the WNCC over the past five years was a denominational-wide split, known as disaffiliation. At a special General Conference in 2019, the United Methodist Church passed a resolution to allow local churches to withdraw from the denomination based on differing views regarding human sexuality.[25] During the time of disaffiliation, between 2019 and 2023, 346 churches of 1,153 chose to leave the denomination.[26] Quickly losing a third of its member churches has put a financial and emotional strain on remaining churches and the judicatory's ability support those who remain in its care. A study from the Duke Religion and Social Change Lab and the Duke Clergy Health Initiative reported, "Financial strains are likely to be exacerbated with the departure of many congregations, potentially making it difficult for the denomination to effectively support a significant number of clergy who are struggling with depression, anxiety, and burnout."[27] Fewer churches contributing to judicatory-level support puts a strain on the organization as a whole.

Disaffiliation and the COVID-19 pandemic would be traumatic events to the organization if they occurred independently of each other. The two happening at the same time elevates these events from traumatic to catastrophic and would drastically change the organization. One statistic that begins to demonstrate the impact of these events is examining average weekly worship attendance. In 2018, before these two events, the average weekly worship attendance among United Methodist churches in WNCC was

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[25] Joseph Roso and David Eagle, "Disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church in North Carolina: Challenges and Opportunities," OSF, (April 17, 2024): 6, osf.io/7et5r.

[26] Roso and Eagle, "Disaffiliation," 7.

[27] Roso and Eagle, "Disaffiliation," 5.

97,754.[28] In 2023, the average weekly worship attendance was cut nearly in half to 53,818.[29] The organization has experienced catastrophic trauma and looks differently today than it did five years ago.

The Methodist movement has a history of adapting when faced with challenges. Methodism, as a movement, came to the Metro District in the early 1800s through camp meetings held in large fields.[30] Camp meetings in Mecklenburg and surrounding counties were mostly ecumenical and included Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist leadership.[31] Surprisingly, the decision to hold these gatherings outdoors was not due to an intentional plan to reach more people but was due to simple logistics. About these early camp meetings, historian James Lee wrote,

> . . . they took place through necessity, and without design: and that there was no plan laid for them in the beginning. In the new parts of the country, where the people were but thinly settled, there were such crowds of people collected together, that no house could hold them, and there were not neighbours [sic] enough to entertain them. The ministers were obliged to preach in the woods, and some of the people to lodge on the ground in order to be at the meetings the next day.[32]

Camp meetings are often described as an innovative evangelism tool that could inform today's church about how to get beyond its walls to connect with new people. Lee describes tent meetings, though, as a necessary innovation due to having insufficient

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[28] Kimberly Ingram and Marcia Patton, eds., *2019 Journal of the Annual Conference*, vol. 2, (Huntersville, NC: The Western North Carolina Conference, 2019), S-4.

[29] Kimberly Ingram and Marcia Patton, eds., *2023 Journal of the Annual Conference*, vol. 2, (Huntersville, NC: The Western North Carolina Conference, 2023), 3.

[30] Ford, Russell, *Methodists in Mecklenburg* (Charlotte, NC: JOSTENS, 2004), 24.

[31] Ford, *Methodists in Mecklenburg*, 24.

[32] Lee, Jesse. *A short history of the Methodists in the United States of America beginning in 1766, and continued till 1809* (Baltimore, MD: Magill and Clime, 1810), 279.

meeting space along with the fact that people traveled from long distances by foot or horse.[33] Camp meetings were an adaptation that helped the church to thrive, and in the current age, the church must adapt again.

Even during such a drastically changing landscape that exists today, there are opportunities to adapt. As the Duke study recognizes hope, "United Methodist churches remain some of the very few institutions in American society where people from different political persuasions can build deep and meaningful relationships with each other."[34] While society becomes more individualistic, the church has the opportunity to welcome people of varied perspectives and backgrounds. The duty of managing this change and retaining the relational aspect of the church will fall in large part to judicatory leadership.

The United Methodist Church has a judicatory leadership structure, defined by the Book of Discipline, to help the organization adapt as needed. District Superintendents, for example, are responsible for being ". . . the chief missional strategist of the district,[35] and are charged to ". . . enable the gathered Church to worship and to evangelize faithfully," and to "facilitate the initiation of structures and strategies for the equipping of Christian people for service in the Church and in the world . . ."[36] These responsibilities demonstrate the authority of superintendents to innovate and help the church adapt to an ever-changing society. The question becomes whether these leaders can overcome the systemic inertia to maintain the status quo to encourage ministry in new, adaptive ways.

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[33] Ford, *Methodists in Mecklenburg*, 23.

[34] Roso and Eagle, "Disaffiliation," 5.

[35] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline,* 343.

[36] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline,* 323.

One of the most inspiring new ministry movements in this context is in the Fresh Expressions of Church movement. Fresh expressions are typically small faith communities that form within a specific societal context, often centered around a hobby or a favorite restaurant. The terms "fresh expressions" and "innovative, contextual forms of church" are used in this document almost interchangeably. "Fresh expressions" carries a connotation of being part of a formal movement, such as the UMC initiative known as Fresh Expressions United Methodist. "Innovative, contextual forms of church" is used as a more generic term.

The WNCC has launched more than 250 fresh expressions since 2017, making it a significant outreach strategy of the conference.[37] Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic and disaffiliations ground these gatherings to a halt, and they have been slow to recover. Superintendents in the WNCC are generally supportive of innovative forms of church, but many superintendents take a hands-off approach in leading them rather than taking an active role in encouraging them. The research to follow in subsequent chapters will demonstrate that innovative, contextual forms of church face several challenges from the existing system and require guidance to facilitate the necessary change for FXs to thrive. The knowledge to lead in this way often does not come naturally. The conference has provided training for FX practitioners, but there has been limited training specifically for superintendents and other leaders.

Without specific training, district superintendents have employed various strategies for supporting FXs. Some superintendents seem to assign more importance to

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[37] Kimberly Ingram and Marcia Patton, eds., *2020 Journal of the Annual Conference*, vol. 1, (Huntersville, NC: The Western North Carolina Conference, 2020), 223.

them than others. Some sought out conference support and further training, while others did not, preferring to let FXs find their own support. To be successful, leaders must understand the legitimacy of FXs as a missiological movement of the church and see themselves as permission-givers and encouragers of these initiatives.

Ministry Journey

In the first eight years of my life, I moved from the panhandle of Florida to California, then to the Philippines, back to Florida, then to Michigan, and finally back to Florida. I moved again in the 10th grade, and yet again when I went to college. As a United Methodist pastor, I have moved several more times. I am only just beginning to realize how much these moves have affected me and my family. I believe that covenant groups helped me to make friends quickly, as I had learned that I might not be in one place long. This has certainly contributed to the important role that covenant communities have played in my life, and why I want everyone to have the same opportunity to belong to these types of groups.

Not everyone moves as often as I have, but there are many other reasons to feel disconnected or alone. Our society today can be one of isolation and individualism. Even people who have lived in one place for years can find it difficult to meet new people, especially in times when life situations change. It may have once been true that people could experience relationship building in Sunday worship. This does not seem to be true today. I consistently visit with churches where people on one side of the aisle do not know the people sitting in the pews on the other side. Churches were also much more

outwardly focused and connected to the community but today tend to be more inwardly focused.

I know what it feels like to be disconnected. I also know what it feels like to be invited into the community when I was a stranger. It is my hope that the church will invite all people who feel disconnected or alone to be a part of these kinds of communities. Also, it is not enough to invite people into existing communities. Churches should continually create communities of connection so that everyone can experience the joy that comes from belonging to a community that explores faith together. I have been blessed to have a professional career that has uniquely prepared me for helping the church to create these kinds of communities.

I had two jobs during my college years that made a significant impact on my life. The first was at the YMCA where I served as the County Program Director. In this position, I organized basketball, baseball, soccer, and volleyball leagues as well as summer camps for 16 unincorporated areas around the county. I found it extremely rewarding to create a positive environment where kids could have fun and find a place where they belonged. In this role, I learned how to create and lead programs as well as supervise staff. I also learned much about diversity and worked first-hand with underprivileged families. I watched young people grow through experiencing healthy community. This further emphasized to me how people tend to thrive in groups.

In the summer before my last semester at the University of Florida, I was accepted into the Disney College Program. The College Program consisted of two major parts: Working in one of the parks and attending Disney University Classes. In Disney University, we learned basic leadership and business practices of the Walt Disney

Corporation. From guest satisfaction to employee management and marketing, I received an education that was just as valuable to me as my entire bachelor's degree. Disney University taught me much about hospitality practices, and I was especially intrigued by Disney's approach to innovation. They were always experimenting with new practices to make the park experience better for guests. This was an excellent supplement to my YMCA experience.

After I graduated college, I conducted a nationwide job search looking for something that would combine my sense of call, my religious studies degree, my Disney experience, and my YMCA experience. I accepted a position as Director of Community Recreation for Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church in the panhandle of Florida that was starting a new campus. This job combined the innovation and hospitality of Disney, the recreation and programming skills of the YMCA, and the spiritual service that I was feeling called to do. To this day, I know that position was no accident. God's prevenient grace was at work. God prepared me for this ministry opportunity, and it was a privilege to join the work of the Holy Spirit in Gulf Breeze. My somewhat wandering road made sense and would continue to prepare me for my work today as District Superintendent.

Working for Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church was an exercise in innovation. We were the second United Methodist church in the country to launch a second campus. The plan for the launch was unique. The church built a community center rather than a traditional church with a sanctuary. The idea was to create a space for community life (we named it the Community Life Center) where we could build a large constituency through recreation ministries and then launch worship from the relationships that we established. We expected this process to take a year or two, but we had more than 2,000

participants in various recreation ministries in our first year. We ended up launching worship almost immediately with 450 people. People honored the vision that God had given them, and God blessed the ministry to go beyond what we imagined.

One of the best parts of the ministry at the Community Life Center was how we reached new people rather than recycling people who already belonged to a church. We first sought to create relationships through recreation. It did not matter if they were Christian, or Jewish, or Atheist, we wanted to build relationships with everyone who walked through the door. Then we intentionally invited people to go deeper into the life of the church whenever they were ready. In this large church system, I observed people truly connecting outside of the worship space, in small recreation communities.

It was not long before the success of our new church began to draw interest from other churches. Churches from across the country would send teams to our church to learn from what we were doing. Then churches started flying me out to their facilities to consult with them as they began thinking about ways to implement what we were doing. Not only was I able to share my ministry experience with them, but I also learned great practices from churches around the country. I absolutely loved this new ministry. Part of my calling always will be helping churches identify what God is calling them to do next and to discern the next steps to take.

I eventually went to seminary at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University as the next step in my career. I graduated seminary in 2009 and was ordained in 2010. From 2006 to 2014, I served three churches. These churches were different than the ones I had served before. Two of the three were stuck and inwardly focused, even though they tried to be open to the community in various ways. In these churches, I

learned about common ways that churches could be stuck and was able to experiment with ways to help them get unstuck. This inevitably meant reaching beyond the walls of the church. I learned how to develop relationships with nearby schools, rotary clubs, chambers of commerce, and civic leaders. These connections became part of a practice of listening to the community's needs, enabling the church to respond with ministry opportunities that the community actually needed.

I was only two years into my appointment in my last church when the Bishop asked me to serve on conference staff as the Director of Church Vitality. In this role, I was privileged to spend my days consulting with churches and helping them to go where God was calling them to go next. I created a variation of the Healthy Church Initiative that I called the Antioch Project that helped churches develop up to five goals and provided coaches to help them. At least one of the five goals focused on helping the church reach outside of its walls, which I learned was the secret to the success of churches participating in the initiative.

In 2017, I accepted a congregational development position in Western North Carolina and entered yet another time of professional joy. I launched another version of the Healthy Church Initiative (called Transformation Journey this time), started 13 church plant projects, and created a FX initiative (directed by the Rev. Luke Edwards) that launched more than 250 FXs in the Western North Carolina Conference. Taking a conservative average of 5 per group, the FX initiative reached more new people than all our church starts over the past three years combined, and for much less financial investment than conventional church starts.

I consulted with more than 200 churches during my time as a congregational developer, and I noticed a pattern. Many churches suffered from being inwardly focused. Essentially, these churches had shifted their focus to exist solely for the sake of caring for their members. Even when congregations do good work beyond the walls of the church, it tends to be less about reaching new people and more about giving themselves a sense of spiritual accomplishment. Because of this, my work with churches naturally developed a bias toward helping churches become more outwardly focused and reaching people of the community.

In 2021, I was appointed as the District Superintendent of the Metro District. Now, more than ever, I want to help churches live into the future. For this reason, I have also begun work toward a doctorate of which this document is a part. My interest in doctoral studies is a culmination of all these experiences. This study comes from my personal experience with belonging to spiritual groups, and a deep desire to help churches become more outwardly focused to help all people have that kind of connection.

Develop the Synergy

God has placed me in this specific context and has prepared me with a specific set of experiences for this time and place in the district. I know what it feels like to be disconnected from a faith community, and I know what it feels like when a church successfully reaches beyond its walls to connect with someone new. I have worked with churches at the local level, and I have gained valuable experience at the judicatory level. I have successfully (and unsuccessfully) launched church ministries and have navigated stuck churches in lay and clergy capacities. As District Superintendent, I am called to

lead the churches of my district beyond their walls to create meaningful connections with the community.

As Director of Church Development, I would help churches diagnose their current situation and discern next steps for the future. I addressed issues at the local church level, assuming that the challenges faced by churches were likely to be unique to each church's context. In my experience, these consultations often yielded great discussions, agreement, and even direction, but rarely produced tangible results toward church health and vitality. I learned that, while the details and context of each church may have been unique, there was a widespread pattern to the underlying issues. I began to wonder if the judicatory system might be contributing to this trend of inwardly focused churches, which would mean that the judicatory system might be contributing to the overall decline of local congregations.

Of course, many factors contribute to church decline. I came to suspect that the judicatory system in the UMC was contributing to the decline. In the book, "The Practice of Adaptive Leadership," Ron Heifetz suggests that organizational leaders should get, "on the balcony" to get a view of the "dance floor."[38] This way of thinking enables organizations to move beyond day-to-day technical operations and develop a comprehensive understanding of how the overall system functions. Being on the balcony allows leaders to observe patterns as they emerge, enabling them to make adaptive changes to the system.

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[38] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Mary Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2009), 7.

Part of the work of adaptive leaders is to discern whether the organization is achieving its stated objectives and to identify which parts of the system might not be aligned with the stated objectives. According to Heifetz, an organization creates an environment where successfully navigating its systems often becomes more important than achieving the goals for which the systems were created.[39] The systems can ". . . become deeply ingrained, self-reinforcing, and very difficult to reshape."[40] It takes someone with authority to make changes and who is willing to live in disruption to implement needed changes.[41] In the context of our conference, our judicatory expects church growth and vitality, but our organizational systems focus more on internal church health.

Making change that truly helps the organization adapt takes hard work and organizations tend to respond by making technical changes rather than adaptive changes.[42] Technical problems can be solved with technical fixes, such as new software or new ministry initiatives.[43] Adaptive problems are "usually grounded in . . . values, beliefs, and loyalties," and require adaptive work that will often bring disequilibrium to the system.[44] If church decline is a technical problem, it would be sufficient to solve the issue with technical solutions. The church has tried a myriad of technical solutions without success, which suggests that the church is facing an adaptive problem.

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[39] Heiftez, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 51.*

[40] Heiftez, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 51.*

[41] Heiftez, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 23 - 31.*

[42] Heiftez, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 70-71.*

[43] Heiftez, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 70-71.*

[44] Heiftez, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership, 70-71.*

By itself, adding a new ministry initiative, like the FXs movement that establishes new faith communities, is a technical solution. The church is generally good at launching ministry initiatives and programs. New initiatives and programs hardly ever change attitudes and systemic outcomes, however. Instead, the new ministry will struggle against the ingrained systems of the church unless adaptive work is done at the organizational level. In the language of Heifitz, a leader must step onto the balcony in order to do adaptive work.

As described earlier, judicatory leaders are uniquely empowered to make adaptive changes to help the church as an organization focus on innovative, contextual ministries like FXs. For superintendents to use this authority to support contextual ministries, they must think of their role as being encouragers of FXs as a ministry movement. The following chapters show that training for judicatory leaders will help them understand the viability and importance of contextual ministries. This training is not designed to teach leaders what FXs are. There are other training resources for that purpose. This training is designed to help leaders develop a better appreciation of FXs and their essential role in the future of the church. The project data presented in Chapter Six demonstrates that this training enhances leaders' attitudes toward their role in encouraging and leading innovative, contextual forms of church.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Christian movement has never been a static movement. It has adapted over time. Over the two millennia of the Christian movement, societies have changed, and Christianity has developed in different contexts and cultures that required unique approaches to spiritual practice. Christian leadership has had to adapt to the changing needs of the church and its mission. The previous chapter described how the superintendent's role shifted to add "Chief Missional Strategist." This is a modern example of how the church has adapted its leadership to meet the needs of the present age. This practice of adapting leadership and operational methods is nothing new to the church. In fact, there are examples in the Bible that show how early Christ followers had to adapt in order to fulfill the church's mission. This chapter will explore one such example, from Acts 11:19-26, when a new church emerges in Antioch.

This passage in Acts illustrates the various roles of church leaders during that period, which included managing and leading change. The narrative takes place during a time when leaders of the emerging Christian church made decisions to spread its witness beyond Jerusalem. A new kind of church emerged in Antioch, which required a new kind of leadership that was permission-giving and encouraging. Examining the role of church leaders of that time will help modern leaders understand how to approach changes in church gatherings today. In addition to gaining a better understanding, exploring this

passage will enable modern-day leaders to envision themselves as walking in the footsteps of biblical heroes. The way that Peter, Saul, and Barnabas treat a new, contextual church will inform today's leaders how to respond as new expressions of church are forming in the 21st Century.

The pericope begins with Jewish followers of Christ scattering to escape persecution after Stephen was killed because of his faith. As these leaders fled, they went into Gentile territories, where they continued to talk about Jesus. In this way, the Good News of Jesus began to spread into Gentile lands, and as a result, a faith community of Jesus followers emerged in the Gentile city of Antioch. Up to this point, Jesus was considered a savior only for the Jews, not the Gentiles, so it causes some concern when the church in Jerusalem hears about this new, unauthorized church among the Gentiles. The Jerusalem church sends Barnabas as a judicatory representative to investigate. Barnabas approves of this new faith community and intercedes on their behalf. He then appoints Saul to work with him in preaching and teaching.

The interactions of these leaders demonstrate a judicatory hierarchy comparable to a typical modern-day organizational structure. For United Methodists, the church in Jerusalem is analogous to the Annual Conference. Peter functions as a bishop, giving oversight to the larger church. Barnabas is a supervisory authority equivalent to modern-day superintendents, and Saul's role mirrors a newly appointed pastor.

The following sections of this chapter consists of an exegetical exploration of this pericope in more detail. It begins with an exploration of the pericope's context. Then the research focuses on the participants in this narrative, providing a better understanding of the tension that exists in the narrative between the Jewish followers and the Gentiles and

how the church leaders adapted to change. The chapter concludes by examining the specific characteristics that Barnabas displayed as a leader, which will be helpful for modern judicatory leaders to consider in their roles.

Contextual Analysis

Knowing the author and the date of composition often helps to draw meaning from any biblical text and this is especially true with this pericope from Acts. Most scholars agree with the traditional understanding that Acts is a continuation of the Gospel According to Luke and that both works are attributed to the same author.[1] While not much is revealed about the author in the text, scholars tend to agree on the author's background. Keener observes that "From his geographical competence and his interpretation of Judaism, it is certain that [the author] was not a Palestinian Jew."[2] Instead, Keener suggests, that the author was either a Gentile Christian or a Jewish Christian of the Diaspora who lived among the Gentiles.[3] The fact that Luke is writing from a perspective other than a Palestinian Jew is a key to understanding the pericope, where a central theme emerges about whether or not Gentiles could relate to Jews and have access to Jesus as their Messiah.

The Book of Acts was likely written in the 70's or early 80's C.E., many years after the events it describes took place.[4] This date of authorship is derived from context

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[1] Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary Vol. 1: Introduction and 1:1-2:47* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), accessed on July 22, 2024, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3117375, 402-404.

[2] Keener, *Acts*, 404.

[3] Keener, *Acts*, 404.

[4] Keener, *Acts*, 390.

clues rather than any specific historical marker.[5] Luke was likely written after Mark, and Acts was likely written after Luke.[6] The author was also likely a contemporary of Paul's as the details of the writing seem to be fresh, which suggests access to eyewitness sources.[7] Pulling these facts together suggest a date that is past the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple of 70 C.E., but still early enough for fresh sources.[8] This would place the writing in a time when it would be important for believers to understand the relationship between Jews and Gentiles.[9]

Seeing as Luke and Acts are commonly accepted to be of the same author, it makes sense that the author would have the same sources for both works. Munck explains that, "Many scholars follow . . . the traditional two-source theory according to which Matthew and Luke are based on Mark and on an oral source (Logia or Q)."[10] It stands to reason, then, seeing as Luke and Acts had the same author, that Acts would draw from the same sources. Acts also has new material that was not included in Luke.[11] Scholars debate the sources of this new material.[12] While some scholars suggest that Luke is the primary author of Acts and is not drawing from other works, Munck offers a strong

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[5] Keener, *Acts*, 390.

[6] Keener, *Acts*, 390.

[7] Keener, *Acts*, 390.

[8] Keener, *Acts*, 393.

[9] Keener, *Acts*, 393.

[10] Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The Anchor Bible,* vol. 31 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998), xxxvii.

[11] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," xl – xli.

[12] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," xl – xli.

argument to the contrary.[13] For example, the New Testament is filled with references to the disciples and early Christian churches to the point that "favorable conditions existed for the formation of a tradition about apostolic times."[14] So, it is likely that Luke pulls from an existing Antiochene source, as well as firsthand accounts from traveling with Paul or from someone who traveled with Paul.[15]

The textual sources of Luke are also challenging as there are two main versions of the text: the Western text and the Neutral (Egyptian) text.[16] Neither of these textual traditions are likely to be the original text, and are likely derived from earlier manuscripts.[17] The Neutral text is typically the text favored in modern translations by most scholars,[18] but Read-Heimerdinger argues that the Codex Bezae of the Western tradition, is the more original and accurate reading of Acts.[19]

In Codex Bezae, Barnabas is introduced in Acts 1:23 as one of the candidates to replace Judas (instead of Joseph Barsabbas as recorded in the Neutral text).[20] This, Heimerdinger suggests, means that the disciples made a mistake in selecting Matthias rather than Barnabas, and demonstrates the Disciples were under the impression that

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[13] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," xl – xli.

[14] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," xl – xli.

[15] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," xlii – xliv.

[16] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," xxxv.

[17] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," lxxxv.

[18] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," lxxxv.

[19] Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, "Barnabas in Acts: a Study of His Role in the Text of Codex Bezae," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 21:72 (1999), https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0142064X9902107203, 41.

[20] Read-Heimerdinger, "Barnabas in Acts," 41.

Jesus was working to restore the Kingdom of Israel rather than understanding that Jesus would restore all people.[21] While the Bezan text did not have enough propagation to be the original reading, Heimerdinger is likely correct to understand the mission of the church to the Gentiles would have been a process of growing in understanding over time rather than a single, ah-ha moment, and that the book of Acts is dedicated to sharing how the church came to that understanding.[22]

While Luke tells the story of Barnabas and Saul in Antioch, this does not mean that what happened in Antioch was an isolated incident. On the contrary, "the full-scale, active Gentile mission stemmed from many dispersed Hellenists."[23] It is noteworthy that the proliferation of the gospel story was not an intentional and strategic initiative of the church but was a result of Jewish Christians fleeing to Gentile cities to flee persecution in Jerusalem. Munck states,

> As was so often the case in the history of both the primitive and the later church, it was not the recognized leaders of the organized church who started the mission to the Gentiles in Antioch . . . In the present case, it was the strong compulsory effect of the persecution that made the Christians from Jerusalem go as far away as Antioch.[24]

The fact that Antioch was not an isolated incident further supports Read-Heimerdinger's idea that the inclusion of Gentiles in the emerging church was a process that took place over time.

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[21] Read-Heimerdinger, "Barnabas in Acts," 47.

[22] Read-Heimerdinger, "Barnabas in Acts," 47.

[23] Keener, *Acts*, 1831.

[24] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 107-108.

People of the Pericope

There are at least three major people groups interacting with each other in this pericope: Palestinian Jews, Diaspora Jews, and a group that scripture refers to as Hellenists or Greeks. The earliest Christians were Palestinian Jews, including Peter and the Apostles.[25] The Diaspora Jews were those who had been scattered by the persecution as referenced twice in Acts, 8:1 and 11:19.[26] The identity of the Gentiles is a little less straight forward. In 11:20, the Diaspora Jews, ". . . spoke to the Hellenists also," but exactly who these Hellenists were is widely debated. While the main text of the NRSV reads "Hellenists," the footnote in the NRSV states, "other ancient authorities read *Greeks,*" which indicates a difference in the source material. Did the Diaspora Jews evangelize Greeks in Antioch, and not just Hellenists, that is, Greek-speaking Jews? This question has long occupied scholars.

The difficulty is over the translation of the word "Hellēnistēs" which ". . . is found nowhere in previous Greek literature or in Hellenistic-Jewish literature . . . [and] in the New Testament it occurs only here and in 6:1 and 9:29".[27] Metzger believes it is a derivative of the word, "hellēnizein," which means "to speak Greek."[28] Stott concludes that this ". . . indicates the culture of the people in question, but not their nationality,"[29]

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[25] James L. Price, *Interpreting the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 149.

[26] John R. W. Stott, "The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World," *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 201.

[27] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1975), 386.

[28] Metzger, "*A Textual Commentary,"* 386.

[29] Stott, "The Message of Acts," 202.

and should be "understood in the broad sense of 'Greek-speaking persons,' meaning thereby the mixed population of Antioch."[30] This conclusion from Metzger and Stott seems to be realistic, as it allows for people to exist on a spectrum rather than one way or another. This means that the Greeks or Hellēnistēs of this passage represented a diverse group of people in a city that was well known for its diversity.[31]

In addition to these main people groups of the narrative, there are three central characters to consider, namely Saul, Barnabas, and Peter. Saul is none other than Paul, the author attributed to writing many of the New Testament epistles.[32] Paul was from the Roman city of Tarsus and was both a Jew and a Roman citizen.[33] This dual heritage explains why he was known by two different names. He was known as Paul by the Romans and Saul by the Jews[34] (or, as per Shenck, Paul was his Roman name, and Saul was his nickname).[35] Saul is first introduced into the biblical narrative in Acts 7 during the persecution of Stephen.[36] He then goes on to persecute the disciples of Jesus before having a conversion experience on the road to Damascus.[37] During this conversion experience, Saul not only stops persecuting the Jewish believers but also comes to believe

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[30] Metzger, "A Textual Commentary," 388-389.

[31] Stott, "The Message of Acts," 203.

[32] F. F. Bruce, "Paul the Apostle," ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 696.

[33] Bruce, "Paul the Apostle," 709.

[34] Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 313.

[35] Kenneth Schenck, *Paul: Messenger of Grace* (Indianapolis, IN: WPH, 2010), 25.

[36] Burge and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 314.

[37] Burge and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 314.

that the Gospel message must be proclaimed to Jews and Gentiles alike.[38] Saul's dual citizenship made him uniquely qualified to relate to the new Gentile church in Antioch, as he could relate to the Gentiles better than the believers of Jerusalem. His conversion story would also make a powerful witness to a Gentile community about how to relate to their Jewish sisters and brothers.

Barnabas is the pivotal character in this pericope as he serves as the connection between the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. There are several reasons why Barnabas was the perfect person for the Jerusalem Church to dispatch to Antioch. Like Paul, Barnabas was also familiar with Gentile customs.[39] In fact, Barnabas was a member of the Jewish diaspora from the Gentile city of Cyprus, which was the same Jewish community of the diaspora "that produced the founders and unnamed leaders" of the church in Antioch.[40] Unlike Paul, Barnabas had a direct relationship with the Disciples, which made Barnabas an effective mediator between Paul and the Jerusalem church.[41] Barnabas was also an outstanding leader among the Believers. In Acts 4:36-37, Luke tells of how Barnabas sold his possessions and gave the proceeds to the church.[42] In Acts 11:24, Luke reports that Barnabas is "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith."[43] Branch expounds on the accolades attributed to Barnabas in the text, saying, "Arguably,

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[38] Burge and Green, *The New Testament in Antiquity*, 315.

[39] Robert W. Wall, "Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," *The New Intrerpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* Vol. 10, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 136.

[40] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

[41] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

[42] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

[43] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

Acts portrays no one else – except the Lord Jesus – in such glowing terms."[44] Barnabas's virtue gave him the credibility to serve as an authoritative voice when weighing in on this new church.

Barnabas was not only a Jewish believer, but also a Levite.[45] "Members of the Levitical household were to be dedicated to the Lord and Israel's well-being than to the stewardship or cultivation of the promised land."[46] If Barnabas's Levirate background compelled him to protect Israel, Barrett correctly asserts that Barnabas was dispatched to investigate the Church in Antioch to safeguard the Jewish followers' witness.[47] In other words, he was sent to Antioch to ensure that whatever church was emerging there was duly authorized. Others believe that Barnabas was dispatched to Antioch for purely supportive rather than evaluative purposes. Wall, for example, states that "when Jerusalem hears of the founding of this new mission, they dispatch one of their own—Barnabas—not to assess or confirm what had taken place but to collaborate with the missionaries already at work."[48] Taking into consideration the emphasis on Barnabas's righteousness, the Bezae text allows for the acceptance of Gentiles to be a process, which seems more realistic. Barrett's assertion that Barnabas was sent as an authority figure to

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[44] R. Branch, "Barnabas: Early Church leader and model of encouragement," *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi*, vol. 41 No. 2 (27 July 2007), 295.

[45] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

[46] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

[47] C. K. Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch (11.19-30)," *Acts: Volume 1, International Critical Commentary* (London, UK: T & T Clark, 1994), accessed September 25, 2024, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472556660.ch-007, 545.

[48] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 136.

investigate is probably accurate. The fact that he supported and encouraged the church when he arrived on site is another testament to his character.

Peter is another important person of this story. Peter was one of the Disciples that Jesus called to follow him.[49] After a fruitless night of fishing, Jesus instructed Peter to throw the net on the other side of the boat, and the net overflowed with fish. Jesus then called Luke to become "a fisher of men (Luke 5:1-11)." Peter would then travel closely with Jesus all the way through Jesus' death and resurrection. By the time the events take place in Acts 11, Peter was in a position of leadership in the emerging Christian church.

Peter was Galilean by birth, born in the town of Bethsaida.[50] The date of his birth is unknown and it is impossible to know with certainty how old Peter is at the time of the events of this pericope.[51] Peter was a fisherman by trade and grew up in an area with a substantial Greek influence.[52] His livelihood would have required him to speak Greek as well as his native Aramaic and Hebrew.[53] The fact that he lived and worked in an area where he would be exposed to both Jewish and Greek culture is, indeed, an important detail for understanding the pericope.

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[49] Luke 5:10-11. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

[50] Carsten Peter Thiede, *Simon Peter from Galilee to Rome* (Flemington Markets, AU: The Patemoster Press, 1986), 19-20.

[51] Thiede, *Simon Peter,* 20.

[52] Thiede, *Simon Peter, 21.*

[53] Thiede, *Simon Peter, 21.*

Setting of the Pericope

The main action of the Acts 11:19-30 passage takes place in the Gentile city of Antioch. Munck describes Antioch as ". . . the third largest city of the Roman empire, capitol of the province of Syria, and home of a large colony of Jews."[54] Keener adds that Antioch was as a strategic location, being near sister cities "Seleucia Pieria, Apamea, and Syrian Laodicea."[55] While historical estimates of its population range widely from 150,000 to 600,000 people, it is generally agreed that Antioch was a contemporary metropolis. The city was founded in 307 B.C.E. and became a "free city" of Rome in 47 B.C.E.[56] "Josephus claims that the city ranked third in size and wealth after Rome and Alexandria," and had its own marketplace, theater, palace, and circus.[57]

Like many urban areas today, Antioch had a diverse population. There was a large Jewish population in Antioch (enough to support several synagogues), but Keener notes that Jews were a minority as the city, ". . . was predominantly Gentile and pagan."[58] He continues to describe the diversity of religious thought as the residents of Antioch worshiped, "Egyptian deities, such as Isis and Serapis, and Greek deities, such as Demeter . . ."[59] It would have been especially difficult for Jerusalem believers to witness to the Gentiles of Antioch because they spoke Aramaic rather than Greek. This, according to Munck, is why Luke "stressed that the disciples who first preached to the

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[54] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 105.

[55] Keener, *Acts*, 1834.

[56] Keener, *Acts*, 1834-1835.

[57] Keener, *Acts*, 1834.

[58] Keener, *Acts*, 1836-1839.

[59] Keener, *Acts*, 1836-1839.

Gentiles were natives of Cyrene and Cyprus."[60] These disciples from Cyrene and Cyprus were part of the diaspora known as Hellenists, and they would have known the Greek language and their culture, thus giving them the ability to preach to the Gentiles of Antioch.[61] Together, these details of the city paint a picture of a self-governed, bustling city with commerce and tourism that had a tolerance for diversity of thought and worship. In short, Antioch made a good seedbed for the birth of a Christian church amidst a Gentile population.

Literary Form

The literary form of the book of Acts as well as the form of this pericope can be described as a narrative account. The book's title, "Acts," self-identifies as a narrative as it suggests that it will tell the story of certain acts (or actions). In Greek, "Acts" is "Praxeis."[62] "The ancient title *Praxeis* was a term designating a specific Greek literary form, a narrative account of the heroic deeds of famous historical or mythological figures."[63] Scholars do not debate the title of Acts, but there is much debate over who is doing the acting of Acts. Some scholars believe the title refers to the acts of the apostles while others believe that the title refers to the acts of the Holy Spirit.[64] Both perspectives add to our understanding of the text and can be held in tension with each other. It could be correct to assert that the text refers to the acts of the apostles *and* of the Holy Spirit.

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[60] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 105.

[61] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 105-106.

[62] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 47.

[63] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 47.

[64] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 47.

Structure and Flow of Acts

Scholars are also not of one mind in deciding how the book of *Acts* is structured. The Anchor Bible constructs an outline based on Acts 1:8, "in which the risen Christ commissions his disciples to be witnesses to him in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and 'to the end of the earth.'"[65] Examining Acts through this structure places focus and emphasis on the spread of gospel message, which can be outlined as follows:

1. The Early Christian Community (Acts 1:1-26)
2. Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-8:4)
3. Judea and Samaria (8:5-40)
4. Gentiles (9:1-14:28)
5. Decision about Gentile Christians (15:1-35)
6. Paul's Mission and Testimony (15:36-22:21)
7. Paul's Imprisonment (22:22-28:31)[66]

These divisions acknowledge the movement of the gospel message, which at the beginning of Acts is limited to the Jews.[67] The gospel then moves to Samaria as Philip meets the Ethiopian Eunuch, and then to the Gentiles of the house of Cornelius and the church in Antioch.[68] According to these structural divisions, the pericope of this study falls within the fourth section about the mission to the Gentiles. This structural outline of Acts seems to prevail over other outlines because the text provides several references as evidence that the main point of Acts is to document and perhaps argue the

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[65] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 120.

[66] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 120.

[67] Branch, "Barnabas," 308.

[68] Branch, "Barnabas," 308.

appropriateness of how the witness of the Good News spread from the Jews to the Gentiles.

One subtle connecting point that offers more proof of this focus comes in an expression used in Acts 11:21, "the hand of the Lord." This expression "recalls the petition of the apostles for God to 'stretch out your hand' to perform mighty signs and wonders in fulfillment of . . . their prophetic authority in Jerusalem."[69] Branch suggests that this subtle allusion is intentional and connects the mission of the apostles from the Jews to the Gentiles.[70] As the Hellenists extended their mission to the Jews, "it was important to Luke . . . that this development should not be and should not appear to be a new independent piece of religious enthusiasm. It must be, and be seen to be, a valid expression, result, and continuation of the work of Jesus."[71] The fact that this is one spiritual movement is upheld throughout Acts. The Holy Spirit was continuing its work rather than starting a new work, separate from the Jewish church.

There is some debate among scholars about the order of the text. The story of the new church in Antioch seems to be out of chronological order, and probably occurred before the events of Acts 9 and 10.[72] Munck reasons that the establishment of the church in Antioch was "an offshoot of the persecution of Stephen,"[73] and that Peter's visit to Lydda and Joppa, as well as the story of Cornelius found in the previous chapters "did

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[69] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 175.

[70] Branch, "Barnabas," 309.

[71] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 545.

[72] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 106.

[73] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 106.

not occur until after the persecution had ceased."[74] If this is the case, it means that the church in Antioch was truly on the cutting edge of innovation as the first Gentile church. This may be part of the reason that scripture mentions, "it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians (Acts 11:26)." Luke is recording the birth of a new church that is not limited to Jewish followers.

The action of this passage begins with Jewish followers of Christ scattering into Gentile territory to avoid being persecuted like Stephen. The places that these followers scattered to, namely Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, were Gentile lands and lands where Jews were living in the diaspora of the persecution (known as Hellenists).[75] The Jewish Followers believed that the gospel message was only for the Jews, and not for the sinful Gentiles. This point is made clearly by the text, ". . . they spoke the word to no one except the Jews (Acts 11:19)." The scripture implies that these good Jewish followers were complying with the rules of the day and not sharing the gospel message with those outside the Jewish faith.

The secret of the gospel did not last long. In the very next verse, the gospel was shared with Hellenists, or Greeks, in Antioch, and from there, ". . . a great number became believers . . . (Acts 11:21)" This drew the attention of the judicatory leadership of the church in Jerusalem, who then dispatched Barnabas to Antioch (Acts 11:22). Scholars disagree about what Barnabas' purpose was for being dispatched. Barrett suggests, "Luke clearly understands Barnabas . . . to have been sent as an official inspector on behalf of Jerusalem, charged to see what was going on in Antioch and presumably if necessary to

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[74] Fitzmeyer, "The Acts of the Apostles," 106.

[75] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 175.

put an end to it."[76] Bultmann and Hahn disagree, suggesting that Barnabas was "one of the Hellenists who had been driven out of Jerusalem and helped to found the church in Antioch."[77] While either could be true, the truth is likely somewhat mixed. Barnabas was likely sent because of his Greek background and that he would understand the people. He also was sent with the authority of the church, meaning that he could choose whether to offer the church's blessings.

While the text does not explicitly declare Barnabas's mission, it does give us his reaction upon meeting this new church. Barnabas "saw the Grace of God" there, rejoiced, and then "exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord . . . (Acts 11:23)." Barnabas, seeing the Holy Spirit at work, acknowledged and encouraged the new congregation. The result was that, yet again, "a great many people were brought to the Lord (Acts 11:24)."

Barnabas then went to Tarsus to find Saul and brought him to Antioch to continue their spiritual formation (Acts 11:25). The two would remain in Antioch for a year, preaching and teaching (Acts 11:26). The community grew in discipleship, as they decided to support the church during the time of famine (Acts 11:28-30). Participating in preaching, teaching, and acts of generosity demonstrates that the community in Antioch matured as a true Christian faith community. A true church had been established among the Gentiles.

It is important to note that this spiritual movement began with a terrible incident, the persecution of Stephen. Barrett acknowledges that "It all started with an act of violence . . . so often Christianity spreads by accident or out of unfortunate

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[76] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 552.

[77] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 552.

circumstances."[78] The Holy Spirit has a history of using unfortunate circumstances to produce new Christian movements. In these modern times, for example, the church moved more solidly into digital meeting spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It would seem like Christian movements would be more intentional and planned, especially since there is an overt emphasis on doing so. The Great Commission of Jesus is to "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19)" and in modern-day United Methodism, this language is reflected in its mission statement, "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[79] In light of these directives, Barrett's observation that major Christian movements often begin unintentionally rather than by an intentional plan of the disciples is especially striking. This pericope serves as an example to the existing church to take the message into the world, to new people and places, whether in person or online, and to be open to doing so in new ways.

Synthesis

The story of the church in Antioch serves as an excellent resource to help modern-day judicatory leaders feel more comfortable navigating innovative, contextual ministries. It is a biblical example of a time when a new form of church emerged among a people who had never been a part of the church before. The church struggled with its own rules and found them in tension with Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations. The church today is finding itself in similar circumstances. It often feels like today's church is disconnected from those who have never been to church and those who have

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[78] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 552.

[79] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 156.

left the church. The parallels between the pericope and the modern-day church will encourage modern-day church leaders to take the gospel beyond the existing local church in new and contextual ways.

One of the most pressing themes in this pericope is how the church struggled with its rules. Peter, as leader of the church, struggled both personally and institutionally with how the laws of the church should be applied to Gentiles. His personal struggle was demonstrated by his vision in Acts 10:9-16 when a voice instructed him to eat unclean food. Peter refused because of the rules, and the voice of the Lord answered, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane (Acts 10:15)." This internal struggle with church rules is of great significance. Early church leaders had to interact with and accept people of different cultures, practices, and rules for the gospel message to go beyond Jewish believers, as Jesus instructed.

The external struggle, then, would entail coming into communion with a Gentile people that the Jewish people saw as unclean because of their culture. After all, among other things, they ate unclean food! Of course, food was not the only source of tension for the church in Antioch. The main issue concerned circumcision. In Acts 15, debate broke out about Barnabas and Saul's ministry to the Gentiles. Ultimately, they decided that God ". . . in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us (Acts 15:9)." While there would still be further debate, this argument would ultimately allow the church to move beyond Jerusalem.

For Judicatory leaders today, the debate might be, "Can we have church in a bar?" or "Can church be a day other than Sunday?" or "Can church be online?" or "Can church be for LGBTQ+ persons?" These questions push against traditional church laws and

practices that keep the church from spreading beyond the walls of its sanctuaries. The story of the church in Antioch helps judicatory leaders to know that interpreting rules to accommodate a modern context has precedent. If leaders understand that they are following in the footsteps of Peter and Barnabas, they may be more willing to explore where the Spirit is leading that may be beyond a traditional setting and with a people that the church does not regularly reach (or even associate with).

Barnabas plays an important role in this story. In modern times, the United Methodist Church might call him a district superintendent. He performs duties that are similar in role and scope to those of superintendents in the regular execution of their work. Recognizing these similarities may help superintendents and other judicatory leaders ground their work as missional strategists in a biblical example of innovation.

Barnabas was an investigator and an advocate. While scholars debate this subject, it was likely that Barnabas was sent to Antioch to investigate what was happening at this strange, new church. Had he reported back negatively to the Jerusalem church, it is likely that they would have condemned the church in Antioch. Thankfully, that action was not needed. Instead, Barnabas ". . . saw the gracious work that was going on and was obliged to recognize that it was of God."[80] Scripture reports that Barnabas "rejoiced" when he saw the grace of God among them (Acts 11:23). Barnabas did not seem to be conflicted by church rules and instead welcomed the new church. Further, he encouraged them to remain faithful. Had Barnabas been a strict advocate of religious rules, his reaction could have been one of disbelief and discouragement.

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[80] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 552.

Barnabas's reaction is important in modern judicatory leadership. Consider a superintendent hearing about a church group meeting in a bar, for example. Does the leader investigate expecting to encounter a group of heathens that do not adhere to religious rules, or to find a group that is experiencing the grace of God that should be encouraged? Certainly, there could be circumstances when a group may need to be corrected or ended. It is also true that judicatory leaders could choose, as Barnabas did, to have the attitude of an encourager and teacher to look for how the Holy Spirit might be moving and offer direction to an emerging community.

Barnabas was a connector and mentor. In the United Methodist Church, superintendents consult with the bishop to make pastoral appointments to churches. Barnabas introduced Saul to the Jerusalem church in Acts 9, which is equivalent to how superintendents work with District Committees on Ministry and the consultation process to appoint new candidates for ministry today. Barnabas knew that not only was Saul a "bold evangelist but one who specialized in dealing with Hellenists."[81] He basically appointed Saul to the church in Antioch as mentor and preacher and did so considering the background and giftedness of Saul that could be successfully employed in this new setting. This mirrors the appointment process of superintendents and the responsibility that judicatory leadership has in sending people with the giftedness and experience needed to succeed in new places.

Barnabas was a preacher and a teacher. Barnabas was a "hands-on" superintendent. He did not check in and leave, but walked with the church for an entire year. As Barrett puts it, "Barnabas . . . satisfied himself that the work was of God and

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[81] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 544.

then joined in it."[82] In Acts 11: 26, Luke states that it is this group of believers in Antioch who were first called "Christians." Wall suggests that the designation of "Christian" is important as it is the culmination of Paul and Barnabas providing instruction over a long period of time and represents the discipleship growth that becomes an important defense when the issue of circumcision is raised again in Acts 15.[83] In other words, Barnabas (and Saul) helping the church along their discipleship journey helped assuage arguments against them later.

Barnabas was a motivator. A good leader motivates people to accomplish tasks that are central to the mission. As Christians grow in discipleship, they tend to want to express their faith through good works. Barnabas helped the church in Antioch grow in discipleship (Acts 11:23). This was demonstrated by the way the church offered relief for the needy during a time of famine and they took on the task of supporting the church in Judaea.[84] In modern times, this is a crucial example for judicatory leaders. New groups may not be knowledgeable of scripture or discipleship. They will need motivation to remain faithful as they learn, and the institutional church will need encouragement to be patient and accommodating.

Conclusion

The examination of Acts 11:19-26 provides valuable lessons for modern church leadership, particularly for judicatory leaders who are charged with managing innovative ministries to reach new people. New expressions of church are not new in the history of

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[82] Barrett, "The Church Founded at Antioch," 547.

[83] Wall, "Acts of the Apostles," 137.

[84] Read-Heimerdinger, "Barnabas in Acts," 40.

Christianity. Instead, the church has often faced periods of innovation, when it must balance tradition with innovation in response to the movement of the Holy Spirit. The leadership of Peter, Barnabas, and Saul in this passage serves as an example for contemporary leaders as the church continues to adopt innovative ways to reach new people.

Barnabas's leadership in recognizing the grace of God at work in the Gentile believers of Antioch reminds today's leaders to be on the lookout for the work of the Holy Spirit beyond the established norms and structures. Barnabas's willingness to engage, support, and nurture this new community offers a model of judicatory leadership. Barnabas did not go to Antioch with his mind made up about the church but left himself open to discover God at work among new people. This kind of openness is needed today as a new generation of Christians is being reached beyond the walls of the church.

Just as Barnabas and Saul guided the church in Antioch through a period of growth and change, today's leaders are called to support new faith communities in their development while staying rooted in the mission of Christ. As the church navigates similar shifts today, like online digital ministry or non-traditional gathering spaces for example, it must adopt the same openness to innovation as seen in the early church. Leaders must carefully navigate religious and judicatory rules to ensure they do not unintentionally squelch the movement of the Holy Spirit, and jeopardize the faith of new emerging communities.

We are living in a time of church decline and the way that Christians have been sharing the gospel message is not as effective in making disciples as it once was. As new methods for building faith communities emerge, we can look to scripture for examples of

when the church navigated similar times. Acts 11:19-26 provides judicatory leaders with a precedent for embracing innovative, contextual ministries while remaining faithful to the gospel. By looking to the example of Barnabas and the church in Antioch, modern leaders can find encouragement and direction as they navigate the evolving landscape of church ministry today.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Traditionally, both the Christian and Jewish faiths identified buildings as designated places of worship, which can be seen in the Jewish Temples to the Christian Cathedrals that dot the landscapes of Europe and America. John Wesley upended tradition when he experienced a profound personal shift in theological conviction and took to the fields to preach. This was the beginning of a field preaching movement that played a significant role in the history of Methodism and offers valuable insights into how Christian ministry has continually adapted to meet the needs of society.

With the example set by John Wesley, it may seem that modern Wesleyan leadership would have developed a broader understanding of where worship can occur, but the debate over sacred spaces persists today. Innovative, contextual ministries have taken the church beyond the cathedral and into secular community spaces, and some clergy and lay leaders still find this controversial. While there were several facets to the field preaching movement of early Methodism in England, this chapter focuses on two specific facets of the movement that highlight the ongoing tension between worship within buildings and more unconventional forms of ministry outside of them.

The first facet of the field preaching movement centers around John Wesley when he decided to take preaching out of the church building and into the fields. Field preaching played an important role in establishing the Methodist movement, enabling it

to reach many more people than traditional chapel meetings. Wesley's transformation from a "proper" ordained Anglican minister to a "vile" field preacher was challenging.[1] Perhaps his most difficult challenge was overcoming his own resistance to preaching outside of church buildings. His innovative style would also put him at odds with the Anglican Church to the extent that local clergy would not allow him to preach in their churches.[2] He eventually embraced field preaching, influenced by George Whitefield, and was driven by a desire to spread the gospel to those who might never set foot inside a traditional church.[3] Wesley's field preaching not only contributed to the Methodist movement but also raised important questions about the flexibility of religious institutions and the barriers to engaging with a broader community.

A second facet of field preaching occurs soon after Wesley's death and focuses on the rise and fall of the Tent Methodists, a lesser-known sect in the history of the Methodist movement. This sect, which emerged after Wesley's death, sought to continue the spirit of field preaching through preaching in portable tents. Led by George Pocock, the Tent Methodists sought to bring the church to the people, establishing temporary spaces for spiritual gatherings across the countryside around Bristol.[4] Their story also illustrates the tensions that can arise between innovation and institutional rigidity. While

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[1] John Wesley, "I Felt My Heart Strangely Warmed," *The Journal of John Wesley* (May 24, 1738), https://ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal/journal.vi.ii.xvi.html.

[2] Adam Hamilton, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 88.

[3] Hamilton, *Revival,* 89.

[4] John Kenneth Lander, "Tent Methodism: 1814 – 1832: one soweth, and another reapeth" (PhD diss., Oxford, UK: The Open University, Westminster College, 2000), https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.0000f96f.

field preaching eventually found a place within the broader Methodist movement, especially in early America, the Tent Methodists struggled to gain the same level of acceptance, ultimately dissolving only twelve years after it began.[5]

Examining these two field preaching movements will offer insight to contemporary church leaders as the church once again encounters movements that seek to go beyond its walls through innovative, contextual church gatherings like FXs. As modern churches increasingly seek to move beyond their walls and minister in the community, the historical experiences of Wesley and the Tent Methodists provide valuable insights into the potential benefits and pitfalls of such efforts. The various challenges they faced offer a framework for understanding how modern-day churches might navigate similar issues in their attempts to engage more directly with their communities. As we grapple with questions of where and how to worship, these historical examples underscore the importance of balancing tradition with innovation in the ongoing mission of the church.

John Wesley and Field Preaching

The Methodist movement's evolution to move beyond church sanctuaries to preach in the fields began with its founder, John Wesley. Wesley, however, resisted the idea of field preaching. He experienced a series of unexpected events that led him to overcome his resistance. The first of these events was on Aldersgate Street. On May 24,

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[5] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 226.

1738, Wesley, had a conversion experience at a religious society meeting on Aldersgate Street.[6] In his journal, Wesley wrote:

> In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.[7]

Wesley's conversion experience came while going unwillingly to the society meeting that evening. The conversion experience that he had been seeking came when he was not seeking it. The unexpected nature of Wesley's conversion experience is not unique and is a common narrative among Christian testimonies. The apostle Paul, for example, had a conversion experience on the road to Emmaus. The Holy Spirit operates in unexpected ways. Wesley's heartwarming experience is an example of the Holy Spirit intervening unexpectedly.

Wesley's Aldersgate experience was not the only time the Holy Spirit worked unexpectedly in his life. Wesley expected to have a successful ministry in the Americas, but his mission excursion across the sea to Georgia was an utter failure, or in the words of Richey et al., a ". . . considerable embarrassment."[8] While his trip to Georgia may have been classified as a failure, it helped to form Wesley's ". . . concern for the well-being and evangelization of Native Americans and African Americans."[9] It also introduced Wesley to the Moravians, which profoundly influenced his theology of salvation and

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[6] Hamilton, *Revival,* 69.

[7] Wesley, "I Felt My Heart Strangely Warmed."

[8] Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America Volume I: A History,* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010), 25.

[9] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience,* 25.

assurance. Wesley's trip to Georgia disrupted his expected life and ministry and demonstrates how disruptions can positively affect a system like the Methodist Movement.

Wesley did not only experience rejection in Georgia. He also experienced rejection from the Anglican church in his homeland. The Aldersgate experience changed Wesley in ways that some did not accept. Some call Wesley's Aldersgate experience an "evangelical conversion" because he became more passionate about sharing this experience with others.[10] The evangelical conversion experience gave Wesley a fervor for God that ". . . offended priests and parishioners alike."[11] He was often called an "enthusiast," meaning "someone who was obnoxiously overzealous," to the point where only a handful of churches would accept him to preach.[12]

The institutional rejection from local pulpits ultimately led Wesley to leave church buildings and preach in the fields. Field preaching was not illegal in England, but it was unusual, and Wesley was initially uncomfortable with the idea.[13] He first witnessed the potential of field preaching in April of 1739, when George Whitefield preached to 30,000 miners of Bristol.[14] In his journal, Wesley offered this reflection about Whitefield's field preaching:

> I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I

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[10] Hamilton, *Revival,* 88.

[11] Hamilton, *Revival,* 88.

[12] Hamilton, *Revival,* 88.

[13] Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience.* 95.

[14] Hamilton, *Revival,* 89.

> should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.[15]

This statement from Wesley demonstrates that he, along with the general church, considered field preaching to be indecent, but he saw the value in breaking with society's version of decency for the sake of Gospel.

Whitefield's success moved Wesley to the point that he overcame his resistance and began preaching in the fields of Bristol. Wesley wrote, "At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people."[16] This experience shaped the ministry for Wesley so that rather than waiting in a building for worshipers to gather, "the Wesleys took the message of God's unconditional love to the people where they were."[17] Field preaching helped Wesley reach people who would have never entered the doors of the sanctuary.

Tent Methodists

Another example of the Methodist Movement shifting from church buildings to the fields is seen in a little-known sect called "The Tent Methodists." After John Wesley's death, the Methodist movement splintered into several different sects, such as the Methodist New Connexion, the Primitive Methodists, and the Bible Methodists. These splinter groups developed due to disagreements that still exist today, such as local

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[15] John Wesley, "Wesley Begins Field Preaching," *The Journal of John Wesley* (March 29, 1739), https://ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal/journal.vi.iii.i.html.

[16] Wesley, "Wesley Begins Field Preaching."

[17] Charles Yrigoyen, Jr, *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), 225.

church trustees wanting control of property and laity demanding decision-making authority alongside pastors. The practices of field preaching and camp meetings were also points of contention that divided the church, which ultimately led the Tent Methodists to form their own sect of Methodism.

John Wesley's success did not cement field preaching as a common and accepted practice among Methodists. The recognized need to reach beyond the church and preach in the open air seems to have faded among Wesleyan leadership soon after his death.[18] The movement returned to focusing on church buildings as the proper place for preaching.[19] In 1810, Wesleyan leadership expelled William Clowes from pastoral candidacy, probably because he was a "camp meeting enthusiast."[20] Clowes would go on to form the Primitive Methodists, which became a significant sect of the Methodist movement.[21]

The Tent Methodists had a similar history. Their story centers around its founder, George Pocock. George Pocock was the son of a Church of England clergyperson, but he decided not to follow in his father's footsteps and turned down an invitation to serve as clergy in the Church of England himself. Instead, Pocock became associated with the Methodist societies in Frome, where he operated a private school. In 1800, Pocock moved to Bristol and began a new school for boys that quickly gained prominence in the

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[18] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 3.

[19] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 3.

[20] Yrigoyen, *T&T Clark Companion,* 414.

[21] Yrigoyen, *T&T Clark Companion,* 414.

city.[22] Not only was he an entrepreneur and educator, but he was also an inventor.[23] One invention that he patented was a kite-powered buggy called a Char-volant.[24] Pocock enjoyed financial success from operating his schools and selling his inventions to the extent that he was able to give generously to the Wesleyan Movement and funded chapels to be built in the area.[25] Pocock became a local pastor of the Wesleyan Methodists, and by 1810, he was a leader among pastors.[26]

Bristol was still fertile ground for outdoor ministry. In 1814, he constructed a tent large enough to hold 500 people to support field preaching.[27] Pocock's tent was a remarkable marquee-style shelter that could be taken down and relocated by the next day.[28] Tent preachers served this traveling ministry in addition to fulfilling their commitments as local pastors.[29] They encouraged participants in tent services to connect with Methodist Societies, intending to reach people who would not normally connect with existing societies.[30]

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[22] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 26-27.

[23] "Pocock, George," A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland, accessed on July 10, 2024, https://dmbi.online/index.php?do=app.entry&id=2199.

[24] A Dictionary of Methodism, "Pocock, George."

[25] A Dictionary of Methodism, "Pocock, George."

[26] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 27.

[27] "Pocock, George," *A History of Methodism.*

[28] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 22.

[29] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 27.

[30] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 28.

However, sentiments about a roaming tent ministry were mixed and began to sour in 1815 for several reasons.[31] Circuit preachers did not always understand that tent preachers were a conduit for membership in the local circuit.[32] As a result, circuit preachers discouraged new people from having any further connection to the tent services that brought them to the faith and connected them to the Methodist society.[33] Some Wesleyan leaders attempted to discredit the tent preachers, perhaps out of jealousy over the crowds that the tent meetings attracted. One of the discrediting rumors that was spread was an unfounded fear that ". . . the tent's presence might encourage an unruly element to disrupt proceedings."[34] There was also a political fear that tent worship would be seen as a "dissenting body" by the "State and Established Church," which could mean harsh restrictions from the government.[35]

As the tent ministry grew, Pocock and other tent preachers requested fewer preaching opportunities on the circuit to make more time for tent services.[36] Instead of granting their request, they were given more assignments than any other local pastors of the circuit in an attempt to keep them too busy to take to the fields.[37] The tent preachers

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[31] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 27.

[32] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 28-29.

[33] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 28-29.

[34] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 28.

[35] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 28.

[36] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 38.

[37] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 38.

responded by finding others to fill chapel pulpits so they could preach at tent meetings.[38] The circuit pastors did not receive this well.[39]

Despite resistance from the circuit pastors, the tent ministry continued to grow and received requests for the tent to visit further and further from Bristol.[40] Up to this point, all of the tent preachers were bi-vocational, and they decided it was time to appoint a full-time missionary.[41] They appointed John Pyer, who had been a partner in the tent movement from near its beginning.[42] Unfortunately, this appointment was not made in consultation with judicatory leaders and became a point of contention.[43]

Pyer was not perfect and had personal conflicts with people in his past.[44] Wesleyan leaders resurfaced these concerns and called for a ". . . committee to investigate his character . . ."[45] Reexamining these concerns did not produce enough cause to dismiss Pyer so they found another way to "constructively dismiss" him.[46] Since Pyer was away for an extended period, he was not present when they renewed his class

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[38] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 38.

[39] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 38.

[40] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 46.

[41] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 47-49.

[42] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 47.

[43] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 47.

[44] Wesleyan Methodist Church, Bristol Circuit, Leaders' Meeting, *A Correct Statement of Facts* (Bristol, UK: Nathaniel Lomas, January, 1820), https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=iQZgAAAAcAAJ&pg=GBS.PA1&hl=en, 4.

[45] Wesleyan Methodist Church, "A Correct Statement of Facts," 4.

[46] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 73.

ticket.[47] Since his documentation was not current, he was excluded from the society and not readmitted.[48]

Around this time, Wesleyan leaders pressed Pocock to conform by giving them control over the tents.[49] Pocock, having personally funded their construction and maintenance, did not believe that the Wesleyan leadership should control the tents.[50] In addition, the tents had been used in ways that could quickly go where they were needed.[51] Being on a preaching plan, like the Wesleyan leaders wanted to do, would prevent that kind of responsiveness.[52] This same type of argument surfaced around chapels that Pocock funded and an organ that Pocock had installed in Portland Chapel.[53] Since Pocock paid for the tents and the organs, he felt like he should control their use.[54]

Superintendents of circuits seemed to offer mixed support for tent and field preaching. The Bristol Circuit Superintendent, Walter Griffith, preached in the tent at least twice.[55] The tent ministry was so successful that they added a second tent in 1817, and Superintendent Griffith was the preacher for its inaugural service.[56] This symbolized

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[47] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 58.

[48] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 58-59.

[49] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 60.

[50] Lander, "Tent Methodism,"60-62.

[51] Lander, "Tent Methodism,"60-62.

[52] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 60-62.

[53] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 60-63.

[54] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 60-63.

[55] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 28.

[56] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 40.

approval from the superintendent and may have helped circuit preachers accept the ministry, to an extent.[57]

Unfortunately, other superintendents were not as forward-thinking regarding field preaching ministries. J.P. Fesenmeyer, a circuit preacher associated with the New Methodist Connexion sect, wrote,

> I observed that the Methodist system is weakened; that it wants re-organizing. The Superintendants [sic] of Circuits have too much power: if one of the other Preachers outstrips him in usefulness, he may, probably, be sent, when his removal is to take place, 200 miles from the spot where he was last stationed.[58]

Fesenmeyer argued that the New Connexion reached ten times as many people as the traditional circuits and at a fraction of the cost. He believed successful field preachers were being moved to ineffective areas or being charged with creative offenses to remove them from the ministry because superintendents of circuits were intimidated by successful field preachers. Like Pyer, Fesenmeyer was ultimately expelled due to a controversy, this time regarding a dispute over the disposition of candlesticks.[59]

These points of contention against field preaching directly led to several divisions that would break away from the denomination, one of which being Tent Methodism, which began as a separate sect in 1820.[60] The Tent Methodist sect is little known, however, likely because it was short-lived. The movement rose and fell like a flash in the pan over five to twelve years.[61] One reason for the quick demise of their organization was

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[57] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 40.

[58] J.P. Fesenmeyer, *An Appeal to the Members of the Wesleyan Methodist Societies Throughout the Kingdom* (Russel Court, UK: Macpherson, 1817), 33.

[59] Fesenmeyer, "An Appeal," 47.

[60] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 76.

[61] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 184-226.

that Tent Methodist leaders, being a new sect made up of local pastors, lacked formal ministerial training.[62] Theological training is essential for any successful Christian movement. While the Holy Spirit can move anyone to evangelize, it is also true that theology is complicated and can be used as a weapon to do great harm. Lay persons need to be in partnership with educated theologians to guide worshipers through sometimes difficult theological concepts.

A lack of logistics and infrastructure also contributed the demise of the Tent Methodists. The fact that preachers were spread out over great distances made it difficult for leaders to meet and organize the movement.[63] The movement grew faster than its infrastructure. Pocock was most interested in the Bristol area, so his participation waned as the movement grew beyond Bristol.[64] Infrastructure is a challenge for any movement of size, and the Tent Methodists grew so far, so fast, that it diluted their leadership. Due to distance, leaders could not meet often enough to provide solid and unified leadership to the movement. Modern developments, such as digital conferencing, would have been a boon to the Tent Methodists. Even with such technology today, leaders must take care not to outgrow their infrastructure.

Tent Methodists also had to compete with other offshoots of Methodism for the same people and resources.[65] After Wesley's death, several sects emerged, like the Primitive Methodists, who also preached in the fields.[66] This created competition

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[62] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 219.

[63] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 221.

[64] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 211.

[65] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 222.

[66] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 4.

between sects for people and resources. It also confused the public with too many different voices. Modern-day churches regularly experience this problem, especially in the United States, which is saturated with various denominational and independent churches.

The leadership style of Tent Methodists also contributed to their decline. The Tent Methodists had a congregational leadership style. This structure of leadership allowed emerging chapels to disaffiliate from the Tent Methodists in favor of being independent.[67] The Tent Methodist sect began with a distrust of the institution, which is reflected in the way they created a network of churches that were given the authority to govern themselves. This kind of governance created a weak bond with the institution and made it easy for churches to go independent, which splintered and weakened the movement. This is true also in modern times, as churches (and society in general) can be weary of institutions, and many churches feel bound to their denomination not by theological conviction, but by property ownership.

Because of these challenges and others, the Tent Methodists ceased to exist by 1832 when their last properties were sold at auction.[68] Pyer was recorded leading a

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[67] Lander, "Tent Methodism," 223.

[68] John Lander, "Camp Meetings and Tent Preaching: Similarities and differences between Primitive Methodism and Tent Methodism," *My Primitive Methodists,* 2020, https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/subjects-2/primitive-methodist-history/camp-meetings-and-tent-preaching-2, 3.

Primitive Methodist service shortly after, in 1832.[69] Pocock rejoined the Wesleyan Methodists in 1835 and died in 1840 at the age of sixty-six.[70]

Learning from the Histories

These historic accounts have much to teach the modern church. One striking lesson from these histories is that the church has always had difficulty leaving the church building. Wesley, along with the church in general, began with a view that worship could only be conducted within the walls of the sanctuary. He had to experience field preaching for himself before he decided to change. These are certainly not isolated events in the histories of God's people. Even in biblical times, the Israelites and Jewish people thought that God's presence was mostly limited to the Tabernacle and the Temple, respectively.[71] This meant that worshipers had to go to these sacred spaces to be in God's presence.[72]

Sanctuaries are defined as sacred by humans, rather than by divine mandate. Because of this human-created rule that sanctuaries are holy spaces, many church members believe that worship cannot be conducted in a basketball gym, restaurant, or pub. Berger calls this "legitimation," when the religious institution ". . . purports to relate the humanly defined reality to ultimate, universal and sacred reality."[73] This act of

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[69] Jill Barber, "Shadwell, Blue Gate Fields Primitive Methodist Chapel," *My Primitive Methodists, August 15, 2012*, https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/chapels/london/shadwell_blue_gate_fields_primitive_methodist_chapel.

[70] John Lander, "Camp Meetings and Tent Preaching," 3.

[71] Robert Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (London, UK: Routledge, 1996), 10-12.

[72] Hayward, *The Jewish Temple,* 10-12.

[73] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 48.

legitimation is a reminder that when humans define sacred reality, it can give the institution great power and influence that could prevent innovation in the name of preserving what humans perceive to be sacred.

These historical accounts also provide insights into several institutional challenges of today. The reasons for the decline of Tent Methodism were largely institutional. The movement failed because it lacked the organizational structure it criticized in the Wesleyan church. Tent Methodists did not have the logistical support to expand beyond Bristol. They lacked the resources to train their preachers and did not establish a sustainable leadership structure. These are all roles typically fulfilled by institutions that the Wesleyan Methodists could have provided. The tent movement did not acknowledge the importance of such an institution. In modern times, there is a societal shift away from institutions, and the fall of the Tent Methodists should serve as a reminder of the important role the institution plays in providing organizational strength and resiliency.

While the institution is important, it can also be flawed. The Wesleyan Church failed to recognize the need for an innovative field preaching movement. They placed too much emphasis on the sacredness of church buildings instead of the sacredness of the Holy Spirit working in the fields. Rather than recognizing the success of field preaching, they felt threatened by it. They were territorial and strict in their rules.

Another observation about the field preaching movement in England is that the issues were complex. It was not only the conflict between the institution and innovation that caused the Tent Methodists and other sects to break away. Several factors played a part in the demise of the Tent Methodists, including personality clashes, theological

disagreements, economic and political tension, and even family illnesses and death. Chapter Five will describe these kinds of systems with so many interdependent variables as complex adaptive systems. In other words, while institutional rigidity contributed to the separation of the Tent Methodists from the Wesleyan Methodists, it was certainly not the only factor, and only a part of a larger, systemic history.

Conclusion

The exploration of the field preaching movement in England, as seen through the experiences of John Wesley and the Tent Methodists, can inform the modern church in several ways, particularly in its efforts to engage with communities beyond traditional worship spaces. Wesley's transition from conventional church preaching to field preaching illustrates the positive impact that innovative methods can have in fulfilling the church's missiological purpose. His personal journey, marked by moments of institutional rejection and spiritual growth, demonstrates the necessity of breaking with long-held, even sacred, traditions when they inhibit the ability to reach new people. Wesley's willingness to move beyond church walls to reach new people helped broaden the scope of the Methodist movement and shaped a new way of thinking about ministry.

Wesley's experiences share much in common with today's church as congregations grapple with declining attendance and seek to remain relevant in an increasingly secular world. His shift to field preaching was not merely an adjustment in location but a spiritual realignment that prioritized accessibility and outreach over institutional formalities. This same spirit of adaptability is essential for modern churches that seek to thrive in a changing cultural landscape. As Wesley's story shows, effective

ministry often requires a willingness to engage with people in unconventional ways and places, even when it challenges established norms. His success in doing so provides a blueprint for churches that wish to expand their reach and fulfill their mission in the 21st century.

The Tent Methodists, while less well-known than Wesley, provide an equally important case study of the challenge to balance innovation with institutional support. Their attempt to carry on the spirit of field preaching by creating mobile, tent-based ministries was an innovative continuation of Wesley's vision. However, the Tent Methodists' failure to maintain cohesion and organizational strength highlights the risks of operating outside of institutional support. Although they were initially successful in attracting large crowds and gaining local support, their lack of formal ministerial training, logistical infrastructure, and alignment with the broader Wesleyan Methodist Church left them vulnerable. Failing to maintain the tension between innovation and institutional stability became their downfall.

This conflict between innovation and institution remains highly relevant for today's church. The Tent Methodists' experience demonstrates that while innovation is essential for reaching new people and adapting to societal shifts, it must be accompanied with a strong organizational foundation. Movements that reject institutional support, as the Tent Methodists did, may struggle to sustain themselves over time. Conversely, institutions that resist all innovation, risk becoming stagnant and irrelevant. The Tent Methodists' rapid decline is a reminder that sustainable ministry requires both creative outreach strategies and a supportive, flexible organizational structure.

Reflecting on both John Wesley's field preaching and the Tent Methodists, it becomes clear that the future of the church will rely on its ability to navigate the balance between tradition and innovation. Churches today can learn from Wesley's ability to recognize the need for ministry outside traditional church buildings and the Tent Methodists' passion for bringing the gospel to people who might never enter a church. At the same time, they must be mindful of the challenges posed by operating without sufficient institutional backing, as seen in the demise of the Tent Methodists. A church that holds too tightly to its traditional spaces and practices may miss growth opportunities. At the same time, a movement that rejects institutional wisdom may fail to establish the structures necessary for long-term impact.

The lessons learned from these historical accounts will help judicatory leaders to feel more comfortable giving permission and support to innovative, contextual ministries in several ways. First, leaders will recognize that providing leadership for innovative ministry is essential to their work. Second, leaders will feel more comfortable granting permission and supporting innovative ministries. Third, leaders will begin to develop ideas about how to approach innovation in better ways by discussing the successes and failures of past leaders dealing with innovation.

In conclusion, the study of the field preaching movement emphasizes that innovative ministry requires a balance of freedom and structure. John Wesley's legacy reminds us that the willingness to step outside conventional spaces can lead to profound spiritual renewal. At the same time, the Tent Methodists illustrate that reaching new people may not be effective without organizational support. For the church today, this balance will be key to its future success as it seeks to engage with an increasingly diverse

and disconnected society. Through a blend of creativity and stability, what the FXs movement calls a “mixed ecology of church,” as described in chapter four, the Theological Foundation, the church can continue to fulfill its mission and serve as a beacon of hope and community for future generations.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The mission of the Christian church has remained unchanged throughout history, centered on sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ and establishing Christian communities. However, the methods by which the church has carried out this mission have evolved, adapting to the prevailing social, cultural, and contextual circumstances of the time. This adaptability is evident in the varying expressions of Christian worship and community that have developed over time, from the house churches of the early Christian movement to the formalized structures of modern denominational worship. The church's approach to fulfilling its mission has changed as society has changed.

In recent times, the traditional church model, characterized by Sunday worship services and institutional membership, has been in decline.[1] This decline may partly be due to the rise of individualism in modern society, which can ". . . challenge our ability to live together in community."[2] New contextual faith communities known as Fresh Expressions of Church (FXs) have emerged in response to these changes. FXs are innovative forms of church that seek to engage with people in their everyday lives, often

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[1] Jeffrey M. Jones, "Church Attendance Has Declined in Most U.S. Religious Groups," *Gallup,* March 25, 2024, https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx.

[2] Rodney L. Petersen, "Christianity and Civil Society," *Boston Theological Institute,* Vol. 4, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), xvi.

outside of a traditional church setting. They are designed to meet people where they are, both spiritually and physically, and to create communities that resonate with contemporary cultural contexts. The FXs movement attempts to solve the church's current dilemma of trying to execute its mission in a fast-changing context.

Some church leaders, however, do not recognize FXs as a valid strategy for accomplishing the church's mission. This chapter explores the theological foundation of FXs and argues that they are a legitimate evolution of the church's mission in response to modern societal changes. By examining the theological concept of missiology, particularly as it relates to FXs, this research demonstrates that these new forms of church are valid and essential for the future of Christian ministry. Understanding FXs as a missiological movement will help judicatory leaders gain the theological understanding necessary to feel confident about supporting and encouraging FXs within their areas of influence.

The following section begins by exploring the characteristics of a missiological movement as defined by modern theologians. The study will then compare these characteristics against the attributes of the FXs movement to demonstrate that it is, in fact, a missiological movement. After proving that it is a missiological movement, the research will focus on specific ways the church may resist these innovative forms of church, including the balance between mission and culture and how FXs connect to the institutional church. This research will then explore similar historical movements to demonstrate that these innovations have helped, rather than hindered, the church throughout its history. The conclusion will show that the FXs movement is a

missiological movement that draws from a historical practice of innovation in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Fresh Expressions as a Missiological Movement

The FXs movement is relatively new and does not necessarily fit neatly into traditional or typical church practice. Judicatory leaders sometimes resist innovation that departs from tradition. During a recent gathering of FXs practitioners, several shared examples of judicatory leaders and conference practices hindering their Fresh Expression.[3] Just like any leaders, judicatory leaders are less likely to approve and support what they do not understand. It is not enough for leaders to know what a FX looks like. They must have an understanding of how FXs fit into the theological understanding and mission of the church. The overall goal of the research presented in this chapter is to help judicatory leaders understand FXs as legitimate missiological movement so that they will feel comfortable granting permission and offering assistance for these innovative forms of church to develop and grow in their areas of leadership.

Examining FXs as a missiological movement will help judicatory leaders think about FXs through a theological lens that they understand. This theological lens will give judicatory leaders the language and understanding they need to interpret the movement within their current structure and permit FXs to thrive in their areas of responsibility. The following section will begin this work by identifying and comparing the definitions of missiology and FXs to understand how the two are theologically related.

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[3] Conversations at the Fresh Expressions UM Preconference in Charlotte, NC, April 22, 2024.

Defining Missiology

Missiologist Alan Tippett defines missiology as "the study of individuals being brought to God in history."[4] More comprehensively, missiology is an interdisciplinary science that applies research from biblical origins, historical and anthropological principles, and the theology of the Christian mission to understand how individuals are brought to God. Missiology examines this research in at least three specific ways:

1. The process by which the Christian message is communicated,
2. The encounters brought about by its proclamation to non-Christians,
3. The planting of the church and organizing of congregations . . .[5]

A missiological movement will accomplish all three of these in some way. Every missiological movement must have a process for communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ. This communication must go beyond current Christians and reach those who are not yet Christians. The last criterion for a missiological movement is that it assimilates new members and engages in a discipleship process.[6] As part of the missiological process, a ministry designed to reach unchurched people, such as FXs, must meet these criteria to be considered a valid ministry. An exploration of FXs will demonstrate that all three criteria for a missiological movement are present in the foundational definitions of what it is to be a FX.

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[4] Alan Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), xiii.

[5] Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* xiii.

[6] Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* xiii.

Defining Fresh Expressions of Church

Because the FXs movement is not confined to one denomination or group, there are various definitions of FXs across denominations and regions. Even so, the various definitions among these groups consistently represent a missiological movement. The Church of England defines FXs as "a movement of Christians who establish and grow new Christian communities where they don't yet exist."[7] Ecumenical Fresh Expression leaders in America and Canada offer a slightly different definition: ". . . a pattern for believers to share their faith in their everyday lives."[8] The United Methodist Church offers another definition: "a distinctly Wesleyan Spirit-led movement of new Christian communities that serve the present age."[9] There are other, longer definitions as well, but these suffice to establish the correlation between the characteristics of a missiological movement listed in the previous section and the FXs movement.

Each definition shares characteristics that identify FXs as a modern missiological movement. First, each definition consists of Christian believers who lead the movement. These are disciples who are called to create new disciples. Next, the definitions include a movement or pattern of sharing their faith to develop faith communities. Faith communities develop over time as "there are natural opportunities to share faith."[10] Finally, each definition specifically requires a new community to form, whether it be

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[7] "Fresh Expressions in the Church of England," The Church of England, accessed April 7, 2024, https://www.churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions-church-england.

[8] "About," Fresh Expressions, accessed April 7, 2024, https://freshexpressions.com/about.

[9] "Equipping World-Changing Disciples," Discipleship Ministries, accessed April 28, 2024. https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions.

[10] "What is a Fresh Expression," Fresh Expressions, accessed July 4, 2024, https://freshexpressions.com/2022/05/20/what-is-a-fresh-expression.

"where they don't yet exist,"[11] "in their everyday lives,"[12] or "to serve the present age."[13] When we compare the concepts expressed in these definitions of FXs against our understanding of missiology, it becomes clear that the FXs movement satisfies the criteria to be a valid missiological movement.

Exploring Fresh Expressions as a Missiological Movement

The correlation between the definitions of FXs and a missiological movement merely scratches the surface of their relationship. The practice of FXs embodies the values of the traditional Christian Mission. Missiologist Cathy Ross has identified three missiological values, which she calls approaches, in her work with Fresh Expression practitioners: Sight, emptiness, and hospitality.[14]

The first approach she identifies is a missiology of sight.[15] FX practitioners possess a spiritual gift of insight, enabling them to read the local culture and context.[16] This is accomplished through community listening, which Edwards calls Lectio Vicinitas and is based on a better-known practice – Lectio Divina.[17] Where Lectio Divina is "a way

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[11] Church of England, "Fresh Expressions."

[12] Fresh Expressions, "About."

[13] Discipleship Ministries, "Equipping World-Changing Disciples."

[14] Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality: Resources for Reflection and Practice* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2015), 18-24.

[15] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality,* 22.

[16] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality,* 22.

[17] Luke Edwards, *Becoming Church* (Richmond, VA: Fresh Expressions, 2021), 48.

of prayerfully engaging with Scriptures in order to hear God's personal word to you,"[18] Lectio Vicinitas is prayerfully engaging with your community to experience how God is at work in the community.[19] The missiology of sight describes the deep contextualization that is found in FXs and other missiological movements.

The next missiological approach is a "missiology of emptiness," which is "emptying one's self to the point of self-sacrifice."[20] This can mean the good works that are often thought of in regard to church mission groups, such as giving food to the hungry and shelter for the unhoused. It can also mean the sacrifice of time and effort to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.[21] A successful FX reaches new people in its context. FXs are not simply new groups for people already in the church, but like all missiological movements of the church, they require reaching new people.

The final missiological approach Ross identifies is "hospitality."[22] She notes, "As we welcome people into our homes, share food with them around our kitchen tables and spend time with them, our perspective begins to change."[23] She describes eating together as a "great leveller."[24] It allows practitioners to listen to their guests, honoring the

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[18] David G. Benner, *Opening to god: Lectio Divina and life as prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 47.

[19] Edwards, *Becoming Church,* 48.

[20] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality,* 24.

[21] Cathy Ross, "Without Faces: Women's Perspectives on Contextual Missiology" (Lecture, Catholic Theological Union, October 3, 2011), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmHgP8C1RbA.

[22] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality,* 27.

[23] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality, 28.*

[24] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality, 28.*

storytellers and developing authentic relationships.[25] For example, a FX called "Growing Together" is focused on creating an inclusive space for women of all cultures and backgrounds.[26] In this gathering, hospitality is offered in the dismantling of racial constructs and societal prejudices to create a safe, spiritual place where women can be vulnerable with each other in Christian community.

Consistent Theological Guidelines

FXs are guided by theological boundaries and safeguards. In addition to following Ross's missiological approaches, FXs adhere to specific theological principles that ensure accountability as a Christian movement. These principles act as guides for practitioners as they build their faith communities. Each FX must be a missional, contextual, formational, and ecclesial Christian community.

Every FX is "missional," meaning that each is designed by Christians primarily to reach unchurched people.[27] Celtic and Roman missionaries went to unchurched areas to reach new people.[28] They adopted a way of life that invited others to join them as they went.[29] FXs operate similarly, going into the world and inviting people into Christian community. For example, a Disc Golf Fresh Expression would invite church members to start playing Disc Golf but would go out to the course to create relationships with those

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[25] Ross and Baker, *Pioneering Spirituality, 29.*

[26] M.A. Beck and S.M. Hand, *Doing justice together fresh expressions pathways for healing in your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 2024), 10.

[27] Michael Moynagh and Philip Harrold, *Church for Every Context an Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012), xiv.

[28] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 33.

[29] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 33.

who enjoy the sport. They would meet as a spiritual community for a time of contextual worship and then share time participating in the sport they have in common.

FXs are "contextual," developing the church to fit with the local people.[30] The theology for contextual churches is found in scripture. Moynagh suggests that one of the best examples of a contextual church in scripture is how Paul founded new churches.[31] "Paul developed this process of going out to different cultures and immersing the gospel in them . . . He entered the habits of thought of his audiences and showed what the gospel would look like when it was enacted in their setting."[32] From this perspective of Paul's missionary journey, we could conclude that Paul was planting FXs, and we can see similarities in how modern FXs work to fit the local context in the same way that Paul did in the days of the early church. Any expectation that we have that the church must look and act universally the same seems to be a relatively modern notion.

FXs are "formational" with the goal of fulfilling the great commission of Jesus to make disciples.[33] Benedictine monks created communities united by a "rhythm of life."[34] They sent out members to form new communities that practiced spiritual formation through shared community.[35] Spiritual formation in FXs is similar. Disciples are formed by ". . . entering into a new world of practices, habits, and relationships."[36] Mentor

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[30] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xiv.

[31] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 5-7.

[32] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 6.

[33] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xiv.

[34] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 37.

[35] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 37.

[36] Ken Carter and Audrey Warren, *Fresh Expressions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 82-84.

relationships include listening, reflecting, connecting a person's story with the Gospel, and prayer.[37]

FXs are "ecclesial," meaning they should become church for its members.[38] A mark of success for a Fresh Expression would be that participants form a meaningful, spiritual community. As they embark on a spiritual journey together, the community would grow to care for one another over time. They would care for each other when sick or going through difficult times. They would create space to grow in worship, study, and prayer. Each participant would develop a spiritual connection to and a sense of belonging within the group. The FX becomes their church community.

Again, these kinds of spiritual groups are not new. One example in our history comes from the Beguines. The Beguines were a group of laywomen who were brought into Christian Community through the "context of everyday life."[39] They lived out their faith by serving others and became the church for its members.[40] Today's FX communities may form around shared interests and, at first, seem more like a secular gathering than a church, but over time, they mature into a faith community.

Balancing Mission and Culture

Successful FXs will balance sharing the Good News to the context of the local culture. In missiological terms, this means that FXs should strike a balance between the

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[37] Carter and Warren, *Fresh Expressions,* 84-86.

[38] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xiv.

[39] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 40.

[40] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 40.

theological and anthropological dimensions of missiological theory.[41] The theological dimension refers to the mission of the church, or ". . . that part which communicates the Good News in one way or another."[42] The anthropological dimension includes communicating the mission within "formal or customary structures" that must fit the local context.[43] These two dimensions of missiology must remain in balance. Churches that maintain this balance tend to thrive.[44]

There is a danger in failing to maintain this balance. Critics question the act of an FX focusing too much on secular relativism (the anthropological dimension) and not enough on the Christian mission (the theological dimension). Moynagh refers to FXs that have succumbed to relativism as "Frosh Expressions," which he describes as "consumerist expressions of church that fail to encourage an obligation to local people and a commitment to the whole church"[45] Archbishop Rowan Williams also recognizes the legitimacy of this concern: "At worst, this ends up in the reduction of worship to entertainment, doctrine to comforting uplift, and witness to marketing."[46] These leaders validate a concern that FXs could be so relative to the context and culture that they fail to develop Christian community. Thankfully, these leaders also offer solutions to this potential problem.

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[41] Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* xxii-xxiv.

[42] Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* xxii.

[43] Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* xxiii.

[44] Tippett, *Introduction to Missiology,* xxiii.

[45] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xii.

[46] Ian Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God* (Norwich, UK: Canterbury Press, 2014), 3.

Archbishop Williams answers this critique by suggesting that the Fresh Expression (or any church for that matter) keep three important questions at the forefront of their purpose:

- How does the Fresh Expression help members grow in prayer?
- How does the Fresh Expression contribute to society (in a uniquely Christian way)?
- Does the Fresh Expression ". . . enable its members to teach and to learn from one another?"[47]

These questions form a helpful litmus test to ensure that an FX is living into the theological dimension of missiological theory. FXs leaders must consider these questions to ensure a proper balance between context and mission.

While an FX becoming too relative is one concern, they can also focus too much on the theological dimension. An FX can be so religiously traditional and theologically rigid that it only reaches those who already have a relationship with the church. For example, the only place other than the church that uses pews for seating is the courthouse, which could be a harmful symbol for persons who have had traumatic experiences there. For them, pews in a gathering space become a barrier to participation. Likewise, unchurched persons are not likely to be familiar with any but the most widely known church hymns, and they might not experience hymns with the same spirituality as someone who grew up in the church.

The same can be true for scripture. Some people have experienced church leaders interpreting scripture in a way that has been weaponized against specific groups of people (women and LGBTQ persons, for example). Moynagh suggests that "We must allow for differences between the New Testament and contemporary worlds, and we must avoid

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[47] Mobsby, *Fresh Expressions of Church,* 4-5.

jumping from the New Testament to now as if the church has done no reflection in between."[48] Successful FXs understand this concept, and many approach scripture in a conversational style, exploring scripture, theological thought, and church tradition in ways that respect their context.

The FXs movement is an example of the church responding to the anthropological dimension of missiology by creating church communities that are intentionally designed to reach a changing, modern context. As Moynagh notes, ". . . in most parts of the economically advanced world the church now finds itself in post-Christendom, among populations who increasingly have little or no Christian background."[49] This is a recent shift in American society. Until recently, there was a societal expectation for all to be in church.

Post-Christendom churches have had to adapt due to these changing societal expectations. Many churches ". . . have developed alternative forms of worship to reengage Christians who find existing church culturally alien."[50] For example, many churches developed contemporary worship services that use modern music in the hope that the service will be relevant to a new generation of people with different tastes in music. Other churches have changed focus away from worship and to serving others.[51] These solutions are often not exclusive to traditional expressions of church and are often

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[48] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 3.

[49] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* x.

[50] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xi.

[51] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xi.

offered in addition to traditional forms, creating a both/and relationship with new and old practices.

The FXs movement is a both/and movement. "The term 'fresh expressions . . .' suggests something new or enlivened is happening, but also suggests connection to history and the developing story of God's work in the Church."[52] FXs live in the tension of retaining their connectedness to the historical church while reimagining the entire church experience. A sermon might be a discussion about a passage of scripture. Acts of worship might involve prayerfully practicing a yoga position rather than singing traditional hymns. It is important for FX practitioners and judicatory leaders to help interpret these innovative differences to the inherited church so that this tension does not become resistance.

In traditional churches, theology is often what drives participation. While some people may be drawn to a traditional church due to its specific ministry programs, they tend to attend a church only if it aligns with their theological beliefs. Traditional church theology does not drive participation in an FX. Instead, contextual affinity groups tend to be the ingredient that gathers people together and allows a group to form. People are more likely to be friends if they share common interests.[53] FXs recognize this social reality and build micro-communities around shared affinities.[54]

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[52] Archbishop's Council on Mission and Public Affairs, *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2009), 34.

[53] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context, 172.*

[54] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context, 172.*

Fresh Expression Networks and Connections

The idea of many disconnected affinity groups running loose would be troublesome for judicatory leaders. There is good news for these leaders. While human nature is responsible for the attraction to affinity groups, it is also natural to desire to be part of a greater connection.[55] Affinity groups tend to connect with other, larger groups that are more societally diverse. Successful FXs will not be islands unto themselves but will be connected as a part of a network. The connection of FXs should include other FXs and more conventional forms of church.

The theological concept of connection is a foundational belief for Wesleyan denominations. In the late 1700s, John and Charles Wesley built the Methodist movement on the idea of a network of class meetings[56] and appointed clergy to connected circuits of churches.[57] Theologically, it is powerful to know that each church is spiritually connected to the universal church. When a local church community gathers to worship and pray, it does so with spiritual siblings across this broader connection. FXs are a part of this connection. The emphasis on connection in FXs is a point that would "strangely warm" the heart of any Wesleyan judicatory leader.

The connection is not only between various FXs but also with the inherited (or traditional) church. This understanding of connection in FXs is emphasized in the term "mixed economy of church."[58] In a mixed economy, "the inherited church and new forms

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[55] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 171-173.

[56] Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 129.

[57] Collins, *John Wesley,* 172.

[58] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 7.

of church exist side by side, in mutual respect and support."[59] In other words, a mixed economy of church favors neither the traditional expressions of church nor new expressions but acknowledges that both expressions of church are of sacred worth to the connection. Especially in lay-led FXs, a connection to an inherited church could provide pastoral support and access to observe the sacraments that they would not have otherwise. Archbishop Williams, who coined the phrase "mixed economy" meant it to represent, ". . . a flow of communication, good news and challenge between different styles of church life that may respond to different personalities and different stages on the journey."[60] Jesus connects both the inherited church and the fresh expression of church, even if they may have different ways of sharing Jesus.[61]

Living in a mixed economy requires mutual discernment between the inherited church and the FX.[62] The early church was a living example of this kind of mixed economy. "Gentiles were not required to be circumcised but were to observe some of the Jewish eating practices (Acts 15.20)."[63] Likewise, modern-day FXs require shared discernment with the inherited church to ensure that the FX is given the freedom to adapt to its context while still fulfilling the church's mission. FXs need the connection to the inherited church and vice-versa.

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[59] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 7.

[60] "Making the Mixed Economy Work," Archbishop of Canterbury, accessed May 16, 2024, http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2044/making-the-mixed-economy-work.html.

[61] Archbishop of Canterbury, "Making the Mixed Economy Work."

[62] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 10.

[63] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 10.

Similar Movements in History

People today have a very different sense of spirituality than people of fifty years ago. This is not an isolated event in Christian history. In fact, the Christian church began as a theological change movement when Jewish followers extended the Christian mission to the Gentiles. As Moynagh notes, "The key question for the Jerusalem followers of Jesus, as for many in the inherited church now, was how to make space for believers with a very different sense of spiritual identity."[64] Early Jewish followers understood their context, and while they struggled with the idea of making space for people who would worship differently, they ultimately helped the church thrive in a new way.

Adapting to new cultures was a practice where Paul excelled. In fact, "emerging churches in our present generation can find their ecclesial form and their core theology by tracing out the contours of the missionary church under Paul's leadership based at Antioch."[65] As expressed in chapter two, Paul's leadership in Antioch demonstrates a church that was changing to fit its context. If Paul and the emerging church could do ministry in new ways to reach new people, would it not stand to reason that the present-day church should be permitted to do the same? This sets a biblical precedent for reaching people while allowing changes in how people live out church based on our societal context. FXs are designed to respond to a changing context in much the same way that our early church did.

The church has continued to adapt alongside culture throughout its history. John Wesley, commonly acknowledged as the founder of Methodism, was influenced in this

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[64] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* ix.

[65] Ray S. Anderson, *Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, UK: IVP, 2006), 21.

way by his mother, Susanna. In 1710, Susanna Wesley led a group of around 300 women who met at their home.[66] This was controversial at the time because it was outside of the church and led by a woman.[67] Her son, John, would go on to innovate new ways of offering the Good News to others by preaching in the open air and forming small group class meetings.[68] FXs continue in this tradition of innovating ways to take the church out to the people.

In 1968, the idea of innovative, contextual groups seemed to be encouraged when the World Council of Churches ". . . proposed that alongside the 'parish' new churches, taking diverse shapes, should undertake mission in the many contexts of work and leisure where people now lead their lives."[69] This statement, from more than fifty years ago, demonstrates the beginning of acceptance of contextual church at an ecumenical level and gives judicatory leaders authority to consider FXs as a church-start strategy. It also demonstrates that the church has known for some time that FXs were not only valid but would be an important part of the church's future.

Conclusion

The FX movement represents a vital evolution in the Christian mission, responding to the cultural and societal shifts of the modern era. Throughout history, the church has demonstrated an ability to adapt to new contexts and challenges. It continually

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[66] Michael Beck, "Part Seven: Susanna Wesley, Ecclesial Gangster," *Substack,* June 27, 2024, https://passionalchurch.substack.com/p/healing-the-compassion-gap-e90.

[67] Beck, "Part Seven."

[68] John Wesley, *The journal of John Wesley* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1951), 38.

[69] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* 51.

reinterprets its mission amidst changing circumstances. FXs embody this tradition of innovation, offering new ways to engage with people who might not be reached by traditional church structures.

This exploration of the theological foundation of FXs has demonstrated that these new forms of church are not just a pragmatic response to declining church attendance but are deeply rooted in the missiological tradition of the Christian faith. The characteristics of FXs, being missional, contextual, formational, and ecclesial, align FXs with the core values of the church's mission.[70] Moreover, the FX movement draws from the historical practice of the church, particularly in its ability to adapt to new cultural contexts while maintaining the integrity of the Gospel message. In his sermon, "The Character of a Methodist," John Wesley listed the characteristics of Methodism and recognized that they are the same as those of Christians in general.[71] In the same way, this chapter has identified several characteristics of FXs and found them to be the same as a missiological movement. FXs are a form of church.

As the church faces the reality of a post-Christendom context, where traditional forms of church may no longer resonate with large segments of the population, FXs offer a hopeful and dynamic way forward. These new forms of church are not meant to replace the traditional church but to exist alongside it, in a mixed economy that values both the inherited and the emerging church. The FXs movement reminds us that the church is not confined to a particular form or structure but is a dynamic community that is continuously being reshaped by the Holy Spirit. As the church continues to navigate the

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[70] Moynagh and Harrold, *Church for Every Context,* xiv.

[71] John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, Sixteenth ed. (London, UK: Printed at the Conference-Office, 1814), http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/10137020.html.

complexities of the modern world, FXs provides a model for how it can continue to fulfill its mission, reaching new people and creating new disciples for the transformation of the world.

In conclusion, the FX movement is a testament to the church's enduring mission to "Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the World."[72] It challenges us to think creatively and courageously about how we can continue to be the church in a rapidly changing world. FX allow the church to accomplish its historic mission in new and innovative ways. By embracing FXs, judicatory leaders can help ensure that the church remains relevant and faithful to its calling in the years to come.

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[72] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 93.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

In today's rapidly changing world, the church faces increasingly complex challenges that require adaptive and innovative solutions. Traditional problem-solving techniques are insufficient to navigate the increasingly complex scenarios that churches face today. As a result, churches must rethink their leadership strategies to guide them to innovate and adapt through uncertain times. Churches have begun the work of innovation, and new, contextual churches are forming. One such movement is FXs of Church, which sends the church out into the community.

Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) Theory is a field of study that explores how organizations, as dynamic systems, innovate amid changing and uncertain environments. CAS Theory is an interdisciplinary theory that is applicable in many fields and is directly relevant to the church as an organization. This chapter explores CAS Theory through the lens of the church as an adaptive system. It will show that FXs of Church and other innovative ministries are part of the adaptive work that the church must do to continue to live out its mission in an ever-changing society.

This chapter begins with a general exploration and description of Complex Adaptive Systems Theory, starting with the types of problems that various systems face. Leaders must be able to identify the differences between simple, complicated, and complex problems. Understanding the kinds of problems that systems face enables

leaders to see the complexity that affects the system and, in so doing, identify the proper steps to take to resolve the problem.

The following section defines agents, interactions, and environments, which are the parts that make up a system. Understanding these parts and how they interact helps leaders navigate complex issues. This exploration will examine how systems may be nested within other systems, how agents exist within and are connected to multiple systems, and investigate how the parts of the system communicate. Leaders of adaptive systems must be aware of the strength of communication between agents or groups of agents to help guide the system toward innovation.

Having established the basic components of CAS, the following sections explore CAS through the lens of each of the previous chapters (biblical, theological, and historical). Applying CAS Theory to the biblical story of the new church in Antioch demonstrates how the Jewish believers innovated and self-organized in response to the problem of how to take the Good News to new people. Seeing the field preaching movement through the lens of CAS demonstrates challenges of innovation in ministries outside the walls of the church. Using CAS to understand innovation as part of the Christian missiological movement establishes a basis for acceptance of change within established theological thought.

The final section will list strategies for leaders to guide CAS toward innovation. This includes convening groups, finding patterns, learning, and experimenting. Leaders of CAS convene groups to strengthen the communication between agents of the system. They also look for patterns in the system, or if the environment is chaotic, they look for new patterns that are emerging. Successful leaders will also put energy into learning, as

an individual and as a system. An adaptive leader will encourage experiments to test the patterns and knowledge they have gathered.

The conclusion of this chapter supports the theory that judicatory leaders would be more comfortable encouraging FXs and other innovative forms of contextual church if they were to see these ministries as an adaptive solution. When all the facets of CAS are considered, it is apparent that the church is facing an adaptive challenge, and that emerging contextual ministries are an adaptive response. Not only will learning about CAS help judicatory leaders support contextual forms of church, but it will also help them lead the church in other adaptive ways as well. Learning about CAS will be a benefit to the entire church system.

Complex Adaptive Systems Theory

While people often use the word "complex" to describe difficult situations they are experiencing, for scholars of CAS, the word "complex" relates to an entire field of study known as Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) Theory. This theory recognizes that some systems face problems that are too difficult to resolve with technical solutions. When this occurs, an adaptive solution is required. Adaptive solutions help organizations take steps toward their future even when they may not fully understand the problem or have a specific outcome in mind.[1] So what exactly is CAS? Well, that answer is . . . complex. Scholars disagree on a singular meaning.[2] Scholars tend to define CAS by recognizing the characteristics they have rather than creating a concise definition.

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[1] James Ladyman, James Lambert, and Karoline Wiesner, "What is a Complex System?" *University of Bristol,* March 8, 2012, https://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/9044.

[2] Ladyman, Lambert, and Wiesner, "What is a Complex System?" 2.

Therefore, rather than beginning with a definition, the following section will explore the characteristics of complex systems.

Types of Problems

One way to understand a complex system is to explore the difference between simple, complicated, and complex problems. In simple problems, the issues being addressed are known, and the result or goal is also known.[3] There are often well-established methods to solve the problem.[4] For example, following a recipe is a simple problem.[5] The solution may involve specialized skills, but they are learnable, and following the instructions will usually result in success.[6]

Simple problems can stack upon each other so they cannot be addressed independently. This makes the problem complicated.[7] Complicated problems become more difficult to address than if they were separate, simple problems.[8] They tend to be larger, require a higher degree of expertise, and involve coordinating layers of systems.[9]

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[3] "What are some differences among simple, complicated and complex problems and work?" Scrum, accessed August 16, 2024, https://www.scrum.org/resources/what-are-some-differences-among-simple-complicated-and-complex-problems-and-work.

[4] Scrum, "Differences."

[5] Sholom Glouberman and Brenda Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems: What Would Successful Reform of Medicare Look Like?" (Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada: Discussion Paper No. 8., 2002), 1.

[6] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 1.

[7] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 1.

[8] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 1.

[9] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 1-2.

However, they still have a known goal and enough data from previous experiments or similar successes to feel confident about the outcome.

Complicated problems can be solved through ". . . the application of causal reasoning and optimization methods . . ." that build on past successes. [10]Sending a rocket to the moon is an example of a complicated problem.[11] The goal is known.[12] Rather than an exact recipe, known formulas are used to compensate for known variables.[13] Expertise is required, and it is not easily attainable.[14]

Problems that are more difficult than simple or complicated problems are called complex problems. Complex problems may include simple and complicated problems but are more complex than the sum of these problems.[15] In complex problems, there is uncertainty to the point that it is impossible to ". . . establish a precise and exhaustive model of reality and risks . . ."[16] In other words, there are so many variables that a solution would be impossible to predict. Ladyman, *et al.* suggest that this creates a nonlinear characteristic that is common to all complex systems.[17] "A system is linear if one can add any two solutions to the equations that describe it and obtain another, and

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[10] Jean-Alain Heraud, Fiona Kerr, and Thierry Burger-Helmchen, "Creative Management of Complex Systems," *Innovation, Entrepreneurship, Management Series: Smart innovation Set,* vol. 12 (London, UK: ISTE Ltd, 2019), 1.

[11] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[12] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[13] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[14] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[15] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[16] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 1.

[17] Ladyman, Lambert, and Wiesner, "What is a Complex System?" 4.

multiply any solution by any factor and obtain another. Nonlinearity means that this superposition principle does not apply."[18] If all complex systems are nonlinear, there will be no 'cookie-cutter' solutions that apply to similar systems.

The nonlinear nature of complex systems means that in many cases, the projected outcome is unknown and must be clarified. "To do this, management organizes a multitude of competences and the organization uncovers a large part of the pertinent data along the way."[19] While leaders can build from future experience, that experience is not enough to predict the outcome of a complex project. This brings to mind the common saying, "We are building the airplane as we fly it."

An example of a complex problem is raising a child.[20] There is no easy formula for raising a child, and experience does not necessarily increase the probability of future success.[21] While sending a rocket to the moon once provides details to make future rockets possible, raising one child does not assure the success of raising subsequent children.[22] The uncertainty of raising a child, including all the changing systems that interact with it, makes the problem complex.[23]

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[18] Ladyman, Lambert, and Wiesner, "What is a Complex System?" 4.

[19] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 3.

[20] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 2.

[21] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[22] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

[23] Glouberman and Zimmerman, "Complicated and Complex Systems," 2.

Complex Organizations

Organizations face all three types of problems and interact with multiple systems. In short, organizations are often complex. When an organization is complex, it "requires . . . alternative management styles and thinking outside the box."[24] Creative thinking is necessary for complex systems because organizations will likely not know or be able to predict the process for solving the problems that they face.[25] When leading a complex system, not only will there not be a fully defined process to achieve a solution, but the actual goal may also not be known.[26] In these circumstances, managers lead the organization in a direction that may be toward an unknown goal.[27] Organizations that are creating a new nuclear model, redeveloping an urban zone, or launching a tech startup are all examples of complex organizations.[28]

Nan identifies three interrelated constructs of complex organizations within Complex Adaptive Systems theory: agents, interactions, and an environment.[29] "Agents represent the basic unit of decision making within [Complex Adaptive Systems]."[30] Nan, whose research is based on organizational innovation, suggests that agents (who can be

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[24] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management, 1.*

[25] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 2.

[26] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 3.

[27] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 3.

[28] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 2-3.

[29] Ning Nan, Robert Zmud, and Emre Yetgin, "A Complex Adaptive Systems Perspective of Innovation Diffusion: An Integrated Theory and Validated Virtual Laboratory," *Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory* 20, no. 1 (2014): 52–88, http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10588-013-9159-9, 54.

[30] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 55.

individuals or organizations) are both adopters and influencers.[31] Adopters learn ". . . about an innovation, its pay-off, and the capabilities needed to realize these payoffs from influencers."[32]

In CAS, interactions describe how agents relate to each other and their environments.[33] When an organization faces an urgent need to innovate, behavioral rules guide agents to interact using networks established with other agents who have knowledge and experience needed to create something new.[34] Agents tend to have mutual influence on each other, multiplying the complexity of their interactions.[35]

Nan breaks down the way agents interact into two categories: connectedness and selectiveness.[36] The idea of connectedness examines the strength of the relationship between agents.[37] The relationship between agents can be on a spectrum from being fully connected to having a weak relationship to not even knowing the agent exists.[38] Selectiveness examines the biases and preferences that affect how likely one agent is to assist another.[39] Some agents may be more predisposed to share knowledge with some agents than other agents.[40]

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[31] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 55.

[32] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 56.

[33] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 63.

[34] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 63.

[35] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 64.

[36] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 64.

[37] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 64.

[38] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 64.

[39] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 65.

[40] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 65.

The environment is ". . . the medium within which agents operate and interact."[41] It is the container that holds the agents and their connections.[42] While Nan focuses on only one environment for their research, other authors speak of multiple systems and systems within systems.[43] Heraud, for example, suggests:

> The common feature in all complex systems is their level of interconnectedness – the encompassing of a large number of elements, generally organized into multiple interlinked hierarchical levels like Russian nesting dolls – and the direct interactions between these levels.[44]

If complex systems are nested with other complex systems, the difficulty of their problems can be exponentially more difficult than complicated problems. The complexity is multiplied when various complex systems interact in complex ways.

Networks of agents gathering information through various connections in different environments may sound like the makings of a spy novel rather than a research paper. However, this is a helpful way to understand how agents and systems interact toward innovation. An example is when the WNCC engaged an organizational leadership consultant to evaluate the organization's leadership structure. The consultant helped conference leaders engage with agents who were underrepresented in the system. Part of this process included being open to innovate in ways, for reasons, and toward results that have yet to be completely identified.

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[41] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 66.

[42] Nan, Zmud, and Yetgin, "Complex Adaptive Systems," 66.

[43] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 5.

[44] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 5.

Applying Complex Adaptive Systems Theory

Having established the basic components of complex adaptive systems, the following sections will consider how complexity theory informs the biblical, theological, and historical foundation chapters of this work. The biblical foundation is an example of a church innovating and self-organizing in response to the problem of how to take the Good News to new people. The historical foundation demonstrates challenges of innovation in ministries outside the walls of the church. The theological foundation establishes a basis for acceptance of change within established theological thought.

Complexity Theory and the Biblical Foundation for Fresh Expressions

A consistent characteristic of complex systems is that they face disruptions. Disruptions are often negative events to the system, but not necessarily so. Chaabane and Trenteseaux offer a good definition of a disruption in an adaptive system as a ". . . foreseen or unexpected event that can either reduce the performances (. . . resource failures, lack of materials . . .) or increase them (opportunity to evolve and develop new practices and innovation . . .)."[45] This definition is particularly helpful because it does not only paint disruptions as negative events, but allows for the possibility that disruptions can create an opportunity for leaders to guide the organization into a preferred future.

It is impossible to know with certainty which disruptions will have a major effect on an organization. Some disruptions are major events that have had a major impact on

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[45] Sondes Chaabane and Damien Trentesaux, "Coping with disruptions in complex systems: a framework," *IFAC-PapersOnLine,* vol. 52, issue 13 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ifacol.2019.11.568, *2414.*

the system.[46] Other disruptions may seem minor but had a major impact.[47] Complex systems involve so many variables, that even minor disruptions could create a large effect.[48]

The resiliency of CAS also means that major events might have a minor effect on the organization.[49] When a system encounters a disruption, it must self-organize to mitigate the disruptive effect. CAS are resilient and have "the intrinsic ability . . . to adjust its functioning prior to, during, or following changes and disturbances, so that it can sustain required operations under both expected and unexpected conditions."[50] An organization's resiliency allows it to self-organize and adapt to new circumstances.[51]

A disruption provides an opportunity for leaders of the system to help guide it toward desired outcomes. CAS leaders do this by identifying, interpreting, and sharing data with the organization to guide it into a preferred position.[52] The data comes from communication with various agents. Heraud calls the communication or relationship between agents a "signal."[53] Like radio signals, this communication exists on a spectrum from weak to strong signals. A weak signal is information the organization does not have, would usually consider irrelevant, or is beyond the organization's current ability to

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[46] Chaabane and Trentesaux, "Coping," 2414.

[47] Chaabane and Trentesaux, "Coping," 2414.

[48] Chaabane and Trentesaux, "Coping," 2414.

[49] Chaabane and Trentesaux, "Coping," 2414.

[50] Chaabane and Trentesaux, "Coping," 2414.

[51] Chaabane and Trentesaux, "Coping," 2414.

[52] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 56.

[53] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 56.

understand.[54] Weak signals bring to mind the saying, "You don't know what you don't know." Leaders in CAS try to identify and strengthen areas where weak signals exist.[55]

Chapter two explored the establishment of a new worshiping community in Antioch after the persecution of Stephen scattered Jewish followers into Gentile territories. Peter, who was the leader of the church, learned about the new church in Antioch through communication channels, but he needed to know more about them. In other words, the signal between them was weak. He sent Barnabas to investigate, or in systems terminology, to increase the strength of the signal from a relatively unknown group. This led to the entire system of the emerging church to self-organize in a new way. If Peter had not heard about the church in Antioch, or had not been open to adapting the way the church operated based on changing circumstances, the church as we know it might not exist today.

Peter led the complex system by tuning in to the weak signal and steering the church accordingly. This is a biblical example of Heifitz's metaphor of "the balcony" and "the dance floor."[56] Getting on the balcony gives a leader an objective view of the dance. From the balcony, the leader sees the agents, connections, and systems as a big dance, and can identify how all the pieces interact. This way, the leader can identify and tune in to weak signals. The same could be said for Barnabas, who went to the new church and became an advocate for innovation based on understanding how the Holy Spirit was

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[54] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 56.

[55] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 56.

[56] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Mary Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2009), 16-17.

moving, even though it was a way that they were not necessarily expecting. The leadership of Peter and Barnabas took weak signals between the Jewish followers and the new, Gentile church that were derived from a major disruptive event (the persecution) and adapted it into something that extended the mission of the church.

The leadership of the modern church would do well to follow this example of working within a CAS. Leaders must get on the balcony to see the ways that agents and systems connect and interact with each other and then steer the organization to innovate around that data. The FXs movement is an example of steering the church in a new way. While the modern church has adopted an attractional model to encourage people to come to the church, FXs movement goes out to the people.[57] Like Barnabas, this means engaging and encouraging people who do not fit the usual mold of 'church people.' Leaders must lead the organization from the balcony to strengthen the connection or signal between the many agents and systems of the dance.

Complexity Theory and the Historical Foundation

The church has been adapting to disruptions for its entire history. The way the church adapted after the persecution of Stephen is one example of a disruption that has already been mentioned. Other examples of disruptions in the church's history include:

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[57] Ken Carter, "Attractional Church, Missional Church and the End of the Home Field Advantage," *Fresh Expressions,* January 25, 2016, https://freshexpressions.com/2016/01/25/attractional-church-missional-church-end-home-field-advantage.

- The invention of the printing press allowed Martin Luther to disseminate information to the public at an unprecedented scale, fanning the Reformation movement.[58]
- The Revolutionary War created the need to ordain clergy in America.[59] To address this, John Wesley felt compelled to consecrate Thomas Coke as general superintendent to America, which formalized the Methodist movement in America.[60]
- The time of quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the ability for churches to meet in person.[61] Many churches used this as an opportunity to develop online forms of gathering that they had not tried before.[62]

This is a small sampling of a long list of disruptions in the church's history that have led to innovation, guided by leaders of the complex system. Sometimes disruption happens from outside sources outside of the system's control. Other times, leaders cause disruption to adapt the system. Chapter three of this work focused on two examples from the formative years of the Methodist Movement, which took preachers from church

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[58] Susan Karant-Nunn, and Ute Lotz-Heumann, "Confessional Conflict. After 500 Years: Print and Propaganda in the Protestant Reformation," *University of Arizona Libraries,* 2017, https://exhibits.lib.arizona.edu/exhibits/show/reformation/role-of-printing.

[59] "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic," Library of Congress, accessed July 24, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel03.html.

[60] "The Ordination of Francis Asbury," The Museum of Methodism and John Wesley's House, accessed 7/2/2024, https://www.wesleysheritage.org.uk/object/the-ordination-of-francis-asbury.

[61] Michael Adam Beck and Rosario Picardo, *Fresh Expressions in a Digital Age: How the Church Can Prepare for a Post-Pandemic World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2021), 24.

[62] Beck and Picardo, *Fresh Expressions,* 24-28.

buildings to the fields of England. These two examples show the CAS theory at work as clergy created disruption in the church system by creating faith communities in nontraditional contexts.

In the first example, John Wesley introduced disruption in the Anglican church by preaching in the fields rather than church buildings.[63] He recognized a need to adapt and organized an innovative discipleship system connecting people from the field meetings to societies and local Anglican churches.[64] He intended this to revive the Anglican Church and enhance its spirituality.[65] In other words, he intended to create a positive disruption in the system.

Anyone can make a difference in a complex system. Adaptive changes are not always made by the officially recognized leaders of an organization. Gupta and Anish suggest that "A person not occupying a position of power . . ." can bring ". . . about a large scale influence on the organization."[66] Wesley was not a bishop or high-ranking judicatory leader of the church, but his adaptive influence on the system still exists today.

The separation of the Tent Methodists from the Wesleyan Methodists is another example of a system disruption. In this example, however, the system could not successfully self-organize. The system failed to balance stability and instability in a complex system when it faced disruption. A stable organization risks failing if it becomes obsolete as its environment changes over time. In the words of Gupta and Anish, "If an

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[63] Adam Hamilton, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 86-89.

[64] Hamilton, *Revival, 86-89.*

[65] Hamilton, *Revival, 86-89.*

[66] Amit Gupta and S. Anish, "Insights from Complexity Theory: Understanding Organizations Better," Tehas@iimb, accessed July 24, 2024, https://tejas.iimb.ac.in/articles/12.php.

organisation is pulled in to stability it will fail because it will ossify and be unable to easily change itself . . .”[67] The Wesleyan societies were in decline at the time, and the Tent Methodists were offering an innovative solution that the rest of the system resisted. The system was stuck in its ways and pulled back toward what it knew, toward stability.

Just like over stability can lead to system failure, instability can lead to failure as well. If the system “. . . is pulled in to instability it will disintegrate.”[68] The failure of the Tent Methodist movement after it separated was due to instability in the system. It relied on a few leaders who were spread too thin as the movement grew. They did not have an organizational structure to support their system. For these reasons, and others, the system was unstable and they quickly failed.

If stability leads to failure and instability leads to failure, how is an organization to survive? Gupta and Anish suggest that, “Success lies in sustaining an organisation in the borders between stability and instability.”[69] The answer is to balance the two. In this case, the balance cannot be an equal balance, or the system would never innovate.[70] An organization must be able to adapt and keep some stability as it does so.

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[67] Amit Gupta and S. Anish, “Insights from Complexity Theory.”

[68] Amit Gupta and S. Anish, “Insights from Complexity Theory.”

[69] Amit Gupta and S. Anish, “Insights from Complexity Theory.”

[70] Ysanne Carlisle and Elizabeth McMillan, “Innovation in Organizations from a Complex Adaptive Systems Perspective,” *Emergence: Complexity and Organization* (Litchfield Pk, AZ: Emergent Publications, March 31, 2006), https://journal.emergentpublications.com/Article/11886d52-1308-44fb-bac6-cff9296aae64/jats.

For FXs, the balance between stability and instability is the tension between the anthropological and theological dimensions of missiology. Recall from chapter four that the core tenets of a missiological movement offer stability to the church as a system while also allowing flexibility to adapt to its changing context. The church's missiological movement has persistently adapted to its cultural and social contexts over two millennia. These adaptations raised concerns among theologians that innovative ministries would allow culture to erode the identity of the Christian mission.

In response, they provided specific criteria to evaluate new, contextual ministry initiatives, like FXs, to ensure they accomplish the church's mission even as they adapt. When seen through the lens of CAS theory, the stability of the system comes from the balance between the theological dimension (mission) and the anthropological dimension (culture). The theological dimension provides stability to the system, and the anthropological dimension allows for innovation.

The balancing act between these two dimensions follows the principle of self-organization in CAS, as agents exchange positive and negative feedback that helps direct the system as it adapts.[71] Because this is a complex problem, multiple layers of feedback allow the systems to influence each other.[72] In this way, systems may adapt while maintaining relationships with others systems. The proof of how these systems have interacted throughout the history of the Christian Church is easily demonstrated by

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[71] Jessica Lohmann, Thomas Kölzer, Gunnar Schaan, and Frank Schmidt-Döhl, "Self-organizing systems in the construction industry," *Engingeering Reports,* vol. 5, issue 11 (May 22, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1002/eng2.12692.

[72] Lohmann, Kölzer, Schaan, Schmidt-Döhl, "Self-organizing systems".

identifying ways the church is the same as it was when it began centuries ago, and also how it has adapted to its present context. For example, communion was instituted by Jesus at the beginning of the Christian Church and is still a practice today. Video screens in sanctuaries are an example of an adaptation to the present context. This is the balance between stability and instability at work in the system.

Leading Complex Adaptive Systems

Leading CAS requires a different approach from leading simple or complicated systems. Simple problems require simple decision-making from leadership and traditional forms of authority.[73] Complicated problems require technical solutions from managers, such as changing processes or modifying the organizational structure.[74] Complex problems need varying leadership approaches depending on the level of certainty and agreement there is about a solution.[75]

When a problem is complex and beyond technical solutions, but there still seems to be some level of agreement on the direction to go, and the outcome has some certainty, successful leaders will use their authority to convene groups for conversation and learning to improve signals among various agents.[76] An adaptive leader will identify weak signals between agents and bring those agents together to strengthen signals in

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[73] Brenda Zimmerman, "Ralph Stacey's Agreement & Certainty Matrix," *Schulich School of Business, York University* (York, UK), 2014, http://www.plexusinstitute.org/edgeware/archive/think/main_aides3.html.

[74] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

[75] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

[76] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

productive ways.[77] This only works when there is some agreement on direction and outcome as this will strengthen signals, but not necessarily change them.

When there is less certainty and/or less agreement among agents, convening will not be enough, and a leader must examine and describe patterns between systems.[78] These systems are often outside of the leaders' control or influence, so understanding the patterns and interactions of these systems helps the leader guide her or his system.[79] The stock market is an example of this level of complexity, where leaders do not have control over the market, but the ability to describe patterns helps to know how to lead the system.[80]

When the system has no certainty and/or no agreement, and its environment is chaotic, the leader must look for emerging patterns to help guide the system.[81] As stated earlier, systems tend to self-organize when experiencing disruption, and patterns begin to emerge. The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a chaotic environment, and church leaders constantly evaluated signals from connected systems and agents (e.g., communication with government agencies, identifying medical doctors in the church) to identify patterns that would help guide congregations through a chaotic time.

Gifted leaders of CAS help the system seek and attain new knowledge. "It is this ability to learn that's the key differentiator between an adaptive and a non adaptive

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[77] Heraud, Kerr and Thierry, *Creative Management,* 97.

[78] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

[79] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

[80] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

[81] Brenda Zimmerman, *Agreement and Certainty.*

system."[82] The weather is an example of a complex system, but it lacks the ability to learn, so it is not considered adaptive.[83] Complex adaptive systems learn from existing and emerging patterns in the way systems interact. The more uncertainty there is among the agents of the system, and less agreement there is about the goal of the system, the more important learning becomes. This learning helps with identifying patterns and navigating through chaotic times.

Finally, gifted leaders make room for small experiments. The system's ". . . ability to learn and adapt is underpinned by key self-organizing behaviors including exploration and experimentation."[84] In other words, it is not enough to gather knowledge. Leaders must empower the system to test the knowledge through small experiments. Heifitz goes further to suggest giving people permission to fail when they experiment.[85] "Adaptive change requires an experimental mind-set, involves risk and brings the real possibility of failure."[86] This creates a culture of testing and learning from the new knowledge. Conducting small, low-cost experiments can mitigate risk while helping to guide the system as it adapts.[87]

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[82] Amit Gupta and S. Anish, "Insights from Complexity Theory."

[83] Amit Gupta and S. Anish, "Insights from Complexity Theory."

[84] Ysanne Carlisle and Elizabeth McMillan, "Innovation in Organizations."

[85] Ronald Heifetz A. et al, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership,* 258-259.

[86] Ronald Heifetz A. et al, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership,* 258-259.

[87] Ronald Heifetz A. et al, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership,* 259.

Conclusion

CAS theory offers a valuable lens through which to view church leadership and innovation, particularly for innovative, contextual churches like FXs. By understanding the differences between simple, complicated and complex problems, leaders can better navigate disruptions as they experience them. CAS will help church leaders guide the church through an unpredictable future. It also provides leaders with a lens to understand how innovative ministries like FXs are a part of adapting for the future. The church, as an organization, has a history of encountering complex problems that require adaptive responses, and will undoubtedly continue to face unexpected complex problems. CAS is a tool that judicatory leaders may employ to guide the church through those uncertain times.

Complex problems require more than technical solutions. There is a web of interconnected systems, agents, and environments that interact in unpredictable ways. This dynamic behavior requires innovative responses from leadership. It would not make sense to stay the same in a continually adapting environment. FXs, along with other innovative, contextual forms of church, are an adaptation in response to a changing environment, helping the church reach people who would not normally enter into a traditional church setting. This is a proper, adaptive response of the church as a system in an adaptive environment.

Reflecting on each of the previous chapters (biblical, theological, and historical) through the lens of CAS theory demonstrates that the church has been doing adaptive work ever since its beginning. It is evident in the biblical story of the church in Antioch as the church adapted to reach new people. It is evident in the field preaching movement

when the church struggled with adapting to field preaching. It was also evident in the theological realm of missiology as the church balances culture and spirituality. It should comfort judicatory leaders to know that Jesus followers in the Bible and leaders of the early Wesleyan Movement (including founder John Wesley) all practiced CAS theory, even if they did not call it that then. Knowledge of CAS theory will help judicatory leaders apply it to contextual churches and the entire church as a system.

Finally, the list of actions a CAS leader may take to help guide the system toward innovation will be a boon to judicatory leaders. Knowing, for example, that convening a group of people to have conversations about the direction of the system and steps to take will add a level of certainty and agreement in uncertain times. Recognizing that learning and experiments are helpful to the system (even if the experiments fail) will encourage judicatory leaders to be open to taking smart risks and allowing for change.

In conclusion, applying CAS theory to the church provides a valuable framework for understanding how the church, as a system, can innovate and thrive amidst complexity. As the church continues to face new disruptions and challenges, the insights gained from applying CAS theory will be instrumental in guiding leaders as they navigate these uncertain times. By fostering a culture of innovation, church leaders can help the church adapt and evolve in meaningful ways. Even in the midst of this change, the church's mission stays the same, while the way the church accomplishes the mission must adapt to the church's changing environment. CAS theory can help the church navigate this delicate balance.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Throughout my ministry journey, I have been placed in creative environments where trying new approaches has been encouraged and rewarded. As the Director of Community Outreach at Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church, I was rewarded for thinking outside the box as I created ministry opportunities. These ministries were designed to create a relationship between the church and unchurched persons. The ministries did not feel "churchy," and instead had a secular atmosphere to make unchurched persons comfortable. I felt incredibly fulfilled in this role of helping unchurched persons find a spiritual place where they belonged.

Reflecting on that time, I am reminded that there were naysayers about my ministry. Some Christians felt like you couldn't worship God in a gymnasium. Some pastors were uncomfortable with the number of people we were attracting and felt like we had "watered down" church to attract large numbers. I am thankful for leaders who allowed our ministry to move forward. Over the course of five years, I had the privilege of witnessing people grow in their faith. To be a part of an innovative ministry where new people claimed the church as their own was amazing.

Now, as a judicatory leader, I have the opportunity to place lay and clergy leaders in creative environments to innovate ministry for the future. I find that I face the same tensions today that existed twenty-five years ago. I am continuously faced with several

questions: What is my role in encouraging innovation? How do I know if this innovative gathering is truly a ministry? I desire to be permission-giving as a leader, and I also have a responsibility to hold leaders accountable for creating disciples of Jesus. Pressure comes from colleagues, denomination members, and the greater Church to do ministry in traditional ways.

I know that I am not the only one who faces these challenges. During one of our doctoral cohort interim peer sessions, I observed a panel discussion about FXs. I witnessed this tension when five United Methodist practitioners shared that their district superintendents often hindered their innovative ministries. The FXs practitioners needed permission and encouragement, but received limits and regulations instead. The training that I received when I became a superintendent did not give guidance on these kinds of contextual ministries, and I realized that my judicatory colleagues and I were addressing these challenges as best we could, but not always in the most helpful ways.

Innovative, contextual ministries like FXs challenge supervisors as these ministries require leaders to hold seemingly opposing values in tension. This research helped me to understand the tension and gave me language to articulate it. It occurred to me that other superintendents might benefit from this kind of understanding. I began looking for themes in the research that could help judicatory leaders navigate the role of supervising these innovative ministries. I discovered that these themes were prevalent throughout the research, and a training based on this research could help judicatory leaders improve how they feel about their responsibility to guide innovative, contextual ministries.

For this study, I designed a series of training sessions designed to create affective change in participants to be more encouraging of innovative, contextual ministries. This could be indicated in several ways: Participants would have an increased belief in the importance of contextual churches. Participants would increasingly feel that their supervisory position is important in promoting and encouraging contextual churches. Participants would feel more connected to how biblical and historical leaders approached new contexts. Participants would be more open to maintaining the core of the Christian faith while interpreting rules and encouraging contextual churches in new ways. The training was designed with discussion questions, surveys, and journal prompts to help demonstrate these changes.

The training is based on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, a core value of Methodist theology. "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."[1] These are the criteria that United Methodist pastors are trained to use to think critically about ministry as we strive to ". . . express faithfully the witness we make in our own time."[2] The training I developed led participants through a session on each part of the quadrilateral, which also follows the research presented in previous chapters (chapter two for scripture, chapter three for history, chapter four for experience, and chapter five for reason).

The scripture session helped superintendents identify how Barnabas and others acted as judicatory leaders to the new ministry in Antioch. The history session explored

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[1] The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 82

[2] United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline,* 82

how John Wesley and George Pocock took preaching outside the church walls as an innovative movement. The theology session explored FXs as a missiological movement and explored participants' personal experiences. The session on reason explored leadership through the lens of CAS, which helped describe the science of how leaders can lead in an ever-changing ministry environment. I designed the training with hope that it would positively affect the way superintendents perceived their roles in leading innovative, contextual ministries.

This chapter will analyze the entire project and present what we can learn from the data gathered. The following section will outline the project's methodology and describe its design. The Implementation section will describe how the project was implemented, including a description of the participants and the timing of the project. The Summary of Learning section will present the findings from the data and draw final conclusions of the project.

Methodology

The research project was a training program consisting of six sessions based on the earlier chapters of this research. I collected data using multiple methods. Participants were invited to participate in a pre-survey to establish a baseline of beliefs and then a post-survey to measure change in beliefs. The heart of the project consisted of training sessions for each research area, followed by group discussion. I led and facilitated each session. Finally, each participant was invited to journal by taking notes and submitting them via email. These qualitative assessments were designed to measure an affective change in superintendents.

The pre- and post-project surveys were designed to measure change in the ways participants perceive their roles in supervising innovative, contextual ministries. The questions were identical except for an additional question at the end of the post-project survey, which focused on how the participants felt about their supervisory role through the lens of the training they would receive. The fact that the survey questions related to the subject material taught in the training sessions would also help to determine the effectiveness of each session in achieving the desired outcomes. These surveys allowed me to establish a baseline at the beginning of the project to measure any change (or not) in the final survey.

After each training session, participants were led through a series of group discussion questions, which were designed to facilitate group learning and reflection. Questions were crafted to allow participants to relate the training to their present-day leadership roles. Responses to these discussion questions were collected and analyzed to determine shifts in affect toward leading contextual ministries.

The final form of data collection was journaling. Journal prompts were given at the end of each session, inviting participants to reflect on the learning between sessions. Participants were also given open-ended instructions to submit any ideas that they had during the project for reflection. Participants submitted journal reflections via Email.

I invited district superintendents from my context to participate in this project. In the UMC, superintendents are judicatory-level leaders who have supervisory authority over churches and pastors of specific geographical areas. I knew that this would be a challenging feat, seeing as superintendents are notoriously busy. In the WNCC, superintendents meet in January through March to project where pastors will be

appointed as of July, so this project came during the busiest season of the year for a superintendent. Another challenge of using superintendents as a focus group is that they are spread across the conference, each assigned to different geographical areas.

Considering these challenges, I designed the project to be completely remote. Training sessions and discussions were held via online conferencing. Pre- and Post-surveys were offered and collected digitally. Responses to journal prompts were collected by email. I also knew that 100% participation would be a challenge, so each session was recorded and offered for later viewing for those who might miss a session. The superintendents who participated were extremely gracious with their time.

To schedule our sessions, I used online software to poll the participants for the best days to meet. The results supported the hypothesis that superintendents have busy schedules. It became clear that the superintendents' schedules would not facilitate six separate days to meet to receive the training, so I altered my project schedule to accommodate. Rather than doing one session per week over six weeks, we met three times over six weeks, completing two training sessions each time. The length of time allowed for instruction and discussion was the same, but it required longer individual sessions. I was concerned this might hamper discussion, but my experience was that the superintendents enjoyed thoroughly discussing the topic, and they offered incredible insights.

Implementation

I originally hoped to begin this project early in January. I sent emails to my colleagues inviting them to participate and, seeing as we were all meeting in person for

regular business, I told them that I would give them more information as well as schedule the sessions then. When we met in January, I spoke to several of my colleagues and quickly realized that I would need to push the project back to begin in March. This year had more pastoral moves than usual, and assigning pastors to churches is a key role for superintendents. We were all just too busy. One learning about implementing a project like this for superintendents is that fall is a much better time for superintendents to participate in a research project.

Not wanting to delay until the fall, I launched a new poll to identify six days in March and April when we could have our sessions. From their responses, I could not identify six days. There were, however, three days when at least six people were available. Based on this information, I decided to do two sessions per day over three days rather than one session per day for six days. Not everyone could join every session, so I promised to make recordings available.

I invited sixteen judicatory leaders who currently serve or will serve on the bishop's appointive cabinet, including district superintendents and conference staff. Out of the sixteen, eight actively participated in the project. The participants were a diverse group of current or future district superintendents of the WNCC. Five were male, three were female, two were African American, two were Asian, and four were Anglo. Participant ages ranged from mid-forties to mid-sixties.

The fact that there were current and future superintendents was a surprise. When I had planned for the project, there was only one superintendent vacancy, and by the time I began the project, we had four vacancies. The pastors identified to fill those vacancies seemed especially excited to participate in this study. In hindsight, it would have been

helpful to include some way to determine whether respondents were incoming or existing superintendents on the surveys. This could have allowed for some interesting insights from the data.

The project lasted six weeks. It included six training sessions over three online meetings, online discussion, individual reflection and journaling, and pre- and post-project surveys. Our first session included an overview of the project, an introduction to the program requirements, establishing a covenant of confidentiality, and completing the pre-project survey.

The second session consisted of training around the Biblical Foundation chapter of this work and specifically focused on how Barnabas, Peter, and Saul functioned as judicatory leaders. Discussion questions invited participants to explore the theme of Barnabas as a judicatory leader and how they have seen themselves, or might see themselves, follow his example in leadership. The session ended with offering a journal prompt to reflect on ways that they see or have seen themselves supervise their districts in ways like the biblical leaders of Acts 11.

The third session consisted of training around the Historical Foundation chapter of this work. Participants reviewed John Wesley's field preaching (which for superintendents would not be new material) and then learned about George Pocock and the Tent Methodists (which no participant had heard of before, and I only learned about through research for this project). The training focused on themes of resistance and acceptance of innovative ministry. Discussion questions invited participants to reflect on these themes and explore how this information might impact their current leadership. The

session ended with a journal prompt to consider how they and other clergy felt about innovative ministries in their district.

The fourth session consisted of training related to the Theological Foundation chapter of this work. Participants learned about the characteristics of a missiological movement and were then shown how these are also characteristics of a Fresh Expression of Church. The study of missiology also explores how the gospel message of Jesus interacts with changing cultures and contexts, which is an important theme in FXs. Discussion questions invited participants to reflect on how they might help interpret FXs to the greater church as a missiological movement and how they might defend the cultural context of the Fresh Expression while also holding a Fresh Expression accountable to the theological context of the greater church. The session ended with a journal prompt to describe times when they served as interpreters for innovative ministry in order to help the church see innovative ministries, or times when they could have, but did not.

The fifth session consisted of training related to the Interdisciplinary Foundation chapter of this work. Participants learned about CAS and some of the ways leaders can guide organizations when dealing with complex problems when the solution is not known. A key learning in this session was that leaders work to establish and strengthen connections throughout their networks. Discussion questions invited superintendents to reflect on how FXs could be an opportunity to develop and maintain connections with persons not currently affiliated with the church. The journal prompt for this session invited participants to reflect on weak signals of their district and who they might need to have conversations with in order to strengthen signals.

The sixth session included reviewing previous sessions and discussing how they fit together. We explored how some form of adaptive leadership was present in each of the first three sessions and how we might apply that to our leadership. I then gave participants the post-project survey. Next, I requested participants to submit any journal responses that had not already been submitted. I closed the session by inviting anyone to contact me if they would like to discuss any part of this project and expressing my gratitude for their participation.

Summary of Learning

This research project explores the problem that judicatory leaders often unintentionally discourage innovative, contextual ministry. The hypothesis is that if leaders receive training to better understand their role as permission-givers and encouragers, they will feel more likely to support innovative, contextual ministries. The data will explore the affective change in participants toward supporting innovative, contextual ministries. The following section will present an analysis of the data gathered through group discussions, the pre- and post-project survey, and journal prompts as evidence of affective change.

Group Discussion

Five of the six sessions consisted of group discussion, usually directly following training derived from the research of previous sections. Throughout the sessions, participants were engaged and seemed eager to discuss and explore the topics. Analyzing the discussions demonstrated that superintendents were learning and changing their

feelings about their roles when providing leadership to innovative, contextual ministries. Below, I offer some general observations about the group discussions as a whole, and then present highlights from the discussions that serve as data to demonstrate key learnings and provide evidence of affective change in participants.

An important part of the data from group discussions is simply noting the atmosphere. I took note of body language, engagement, facial expressions, and whether participants were taking ownership of the ideas presented. It is asking much for superintendents to give of their time to go through training and discussion sessions for doctoral research. I almost expected half-hearted participation in an effort to get through it quickly. My experience was the exact opposite. The participants were engaged and the discussion was excellent. Every participant chose to speak to every question, and for almost every question, there was true discussion where one response would build on another.

On one level, this project is a test of complex adaptive systems theory in and of itself. The problem of this study, that superintendents unintentionally hinder contextual forms of church, is a complex systems problem. It recognizes a weak signal between agents of the system, in this case, between superintendents and FXs. Holding a discussion group with superintendents helps to strengthen that signal. Participants built on each other's comments during the conversations to become more and more engaged. In several instances, this led to some statement of increased personal commitment to FXs, which demonstrated a positive change in affect.

The first session focused on the overall project and logistics. It did not include group discussion. The group discussion in session two focused on the actions of church

leaders toward a new church emerging in Gentile territory. The first discussion question was, “Have you ever felt like Barnabas encountering a new ministry?” One participant recalled his church beginning a farmer’s market, and immediately used language from the training, such as, “my role was to ask lots of questions, listen well, be an encourager, and experiment.” On the theme of experimenting, a learning emerged around a superintendent giving a project time to develop. A new ministry may develop differently than expected at first, but over time, it could become what it was originally meant to be and so much more.

The second question was, “Have you ever struggled with the tension between the rules of the church and reaching new people? What happened?” One participant talked about new ministries in her district that were starting to bear fruit, but wondered about financial sustainability of those models. As these ministries grow, it creates a tension that reaching new people requires additional resources. Another participant talked about a church wanting more new, younger, and active members. The tension came when the new people were different than the “old guard,” and it was her job to help the “old guard” accept new people.

The third and final question was, “Can you think of and share a time when you unexpectedly encountered the Holy Spirit at work in a group of people?” One incoming superintendent immediately processed and applied the question to her upcoming role by wondering out loud if she would approach new ministries with the same kind of openness, which she admitted that she had not thought about before. Another superintendent recognized the need for superintendents to make way for new ministries in the face of resistance. She recognized that there would have been resistance from Jews

and Gentiles alike. This tension, she realized, was similar to one of our new innovative, contextual ministries called Beer and Hymns, which was met with resistance from community leaders and the church. One participant described that Barnabas practiced openness by bringing in Paul as a preacher and teacher. Paul could relate to the context, and then Barnabas gets out of the way, and allows Paul to use his gift.

Another superintendent recognized that there were at least two crises in the Antioch pericope. The first crisis being the persecution of Christians, and the second crisis being the theological debate about whether to include Gentiles. This led another superintendent to note that the Chinese character for crisis combines the characters of danger and opportunity. Another participant recognized that this underscored the importance for superintendents to follow spiritual practices in order to recognize movements of the Holy Spirit.

The group discussion in session three focused on the Methodist history, specifically the field preaching of John Wesley and the Tent Methodist sect. The first question was, “How does the history of John Wesley’s field preaching and the Tent Methodists relate to our work today?” One participant commented that just like Methodism then, we need to determine how denominational leaders can support new ministries. He shared that we have new ministries right now that are good, but are not sustainable due to lack of resources or leaders. He concluded, “We need to figure out how Fresh Expressions and the institution can be friends, rather than just a head nod.” The question might be summed as, “How do we maintain institutional structure while allowing for innovative growth?” He further identified that both new ministries and the

institution are needed, or else our new ministries will end up like the Tent Methodists, who did not have an adequate structure for growth.

The second question was, “Have you observed resistance to new, innovative ministry from other clergy, and what is our role in that as superintendents?” One superintendent commented, “A specific resistance I'm thinking about is a hard working local pastor when there was a fresh expression was starting in her area, she said, ‘We've already tried that.’ It becomes this defensive nature rather than asking how they can help. As a superintendent, I realized I did not do enough prep work.” He went on to say that he could have introduced the idea to area pastors and invited them to help and be supportive. Another participant suggested that a superintendent’s role should be to foster collaboration between FXs and existing churches. Not only would this ease the tension, but potentially create partnerships that would help FXs to be sustainable. He went on to recognize that Missional Networks, or groups of churches that relate to each other for common ministry, is a place where he’s seen FXs thrive.

The group discussion in session four focused on FXs as a missiological movement. Participants were asked to reflect on the presentation and identify how superintendents could help with the tension between church and culture. This question sparked a discussion about the participants’ experience with how FXs have been received in other countries. One participant reflected on the superintendent’s role in assuring that each FXs is “connected to the ecclesiology of the church.” He mentioned that Germany had given up on FXs because they did not see these “separate groups” as connected to the church. The idea of superintendents ensuring that FXs were connected in some way to an anchor or inherited church would help to alleviate this concern.

Another participant reflected on the church in Japanese-occupied Korea. Missionaries to Korea did not begin their work by starting churches. They read the community first and then started schools and hospitals because that was what was needed. Churches began in the communities that formed in these schools and hospitals. This demonstrated that the participants were reconciling their concerns about how a group that did not have obvious connections to church could mature into communities of faith.

The group discussion in session five focused on how FXs relates to the church as a complex adaptive system. The first question was, “Where have you seen complex adaptive systems at work and some of the pieces?” Covid and church disaffiliations were among the first responses. Participants reflected on how these disruptions necessitated complex adaptation from leadership. During Covid, one participant noted, judicatory leaders were making decisions and had to develop relationships with agents that were not strongly connected. Leaders established relationships with doctors and government services in ways they had not needed to do before. Churches who were not online learned how to be online, and judicatory leadership facilitated that. It was, in fact, already a goal of leadership to help churches get online, and when Covid struck, this became an opportunity to encourage all churches to have an online presence. When we resumed in person worship, we had new, online gatherings that we did not have before.

Another participant reflected on disruptions being a precursor to adaptive change, like was true for the church in Antioch. She suggested that while Covid and disaffiliations were disruptions, that we currently have a disruption in a church that is experiencing massive decline. She continued to suggest that maybe the church's growth

in the 50s and 60s was aberrant growth that actually hurt the church by producing less authentic expressions of the church. She suggested that the current decline might be a correction that will allow the church to reestablish authenticity for our current age.

The second question was, “Can you think of an agent that you currently have a weak signal with that you would consider strengthening over the next months or year?” One reply was that the signal between judicatory leaders and laity is a weak signal. Strengthening this signal would help navigate the complex adaptive systems we work with.

The third question was, “What is the signal strength between your position as a judicatory leader and the FXs in your district, and how important is it to maintain or increase that signal strength?” One superintendent responded by saying the signal is weak, and there are multiple reasons, with one being that FXs most dissipated during the pandemic, and other factors like hosting General Conference took superintendents' attention. These were interferences in the signal strength. The superintendents agreed that they often left the responsibility for maintaining this signal strength to pastors of other churches connected to FXs, and the shared learning from the example of Barnabas and our systems knowledge is that superintendents should be intentional in offering encouragement and strengthening those systems. Another superintendent reflected further that superintendents once had District Vitality Associates who served as a connection to FXs, and those positions have been discontinued. The superintendents did not necessarily consider how to strengthen that signal in their absence.

Pre- and Post-Project Surveys

Participants were administered a survey at the beginning of the project and then an almost identical survey at the end of the project. The survey allowed participants to answer questions anonymously. Six of the eight participants participated in the survey. This section will analyze the survey responses to demonstrate a change in the participants' perception of innovative, contextual ministries.

The first question of the survey asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10 . . ., how important do you feel contextual forms of church are to accomplishing the mission of the church?” The average response among the participants was 7.6 in the pre-survey and 8.0 in the post-survey. This demonstrates a slight increase in the overall perception of superintendents after completing the training. Two respondents stayed the same, three respondents increased their ratings, and one respondent’s rating decreased. The decreased response seems to be an outlier as other responses from this respondent seemed to show an increased sense of importance for contextual forms of church. The follow-up to this question asked respondents to explain why they chose the rating. Just like the ratings would indicate, there was not much change in the respondents' answers. This may be because this group of superintendents, as demonstrated by the average score of 7.6, already valued the idea of the church being contextual.

The second question of the survey was, “What are some reasons that you feel members of the district or conference might resist innovative, contextual forms of church?” Resistance to innovative, contextual forms of church was a theme that was present in all four teaching sessions, and this question was designed to see if the training impacted how the superintendents viewed their role in addressing this resistance. The

responses began to show this change. In the pre-survey, one respondent stated that a reason for resistance would be that churches did not like to try something new. This changed in the post-survey response to, “Because the district or conference does not fully understand the contexts of our local churches.” This response shows a change in perspective from a local church response to a systems-wide response. Another respondent moved from focusing on sustainability to adding language from the training to suggest that resistance could come from not giving permission for new kinds of churches to emerge. A third respondent moved from a response focused on the local church to a response focused on the respondent’s willingness to change as a judicatory leader, which demonstrated a growth in personal ownership of this complex problem as a leader.

The next question in the survey addressed the role of the superintendent directly by asking, “As a judicatory leader, what do you believe is your role in leadership of contextual forms of church?” The pre-survey answers tended to be good, general responses for leaders. In the post-survey responses, four of the six respondents added hands-on leadership language (like supervision, accountability, making safe space for trying something new) to their responses that was not there before. Networking was another theme that emerged in responses. Two respondents added language about connecting people to opportunities, and two other respondents added language about supervision and accountability. This is a change from the previous responses, where the respondents used language that was more hands-off, expecting leadership to come from the local church.

The next question asked, “What do you believe judicatory leaders should do to promote contextual forms of church?” One respondent’s response went from passive

participation, “providing training, resources, networking,” to more active involvement, “. . . to support and participate in initiatives . . .” and “. . . identify clergy and laity . . .” Another participant went from language expressing FXs as experiments to language about identifying leaders and opportunities. Four out of the six respondents seemed to move from responding as judicatory leaders in general to more active ways that they could respond individually. This demonstrates that they were beginning to see themselves in the role in a new way.

The final question that appeared on both surveys was, “Out of 100%, what percentage of time do you feel district superintendents should devote to district strategies for contextual forms of church?” None of the training sessions or discussions addressed how much time a superintendent should devote to this work, which means that the data from this question would demonstrate a change in overall perception toward this work. The average of the pre-survey responses was 22%. The average of the post-survey responses was 39%. Three respondents stayed the same, and three respondents increased. No respondent reflected a decrease in the amount of time a superintendent should allocate to this work.

The post-survey had one additional question which was, “What about this training do you feel is most helpful to equip you for leading innovative, contextual ministry? What do you feel was not helpful?” Three respondents cited the study on Barnabas as a Superintendent to be helpful as they considered their role in new, contextual ministries. Three respondents identified the group discussions as helpful for them to have conversations with others in the role to come to a better understanding.

Journal Reflections

Journaling produced the least feedback of this research's three data collection methods. Participation in journaling declined after the first session. A learning from this survey is that superintendents are very busy, and it is best to get responses while they are engaged in person. Passive participation is too much to ask of their busy schedules. Even so, there were some helpful responses that contributed to the learning of this project.

Reflecting on the Biblical session that taught about Barnabas, Peter, and Saul as judicatory leaders, one respondent wrote, "I saw how apt this passage is for a project on Fresh Expressions. They were dealing with a Fresh Expression from the Holy Spirit, and I see themes in the Fresh Expressions work today." The work of the Holy Spirit in FXs was a continuing theme in our conversations.

Two other participants reflected in ways that showed they were looking at their own role through the lens of Barnabas. One wrote, "I am seeing all sorts of connections to the first session with the work, and I am going to reread all of Acts through the lens of Barnabas as superintendent." Another reflected on how he was establishing trust between innovative ministries and the larger church, like Barnabas did for the church in Antioch. These responses demonstrate an excitement about learning how to lead innovative, contextual ministries in new ways.

There were also a couple of helpful reflections about the historical teaching session. One superintendent recognized that "the Bishop helps to set the stage for the success of Fresh Expressions," and in the WNCC context, the bishop is very supportive of FXs. Other conferences may not have the same level of episcopal support. Another

superintendent observed that the people most threatened by the tent movement were those who had become dependent on the previous system.

Reflecting on Complex Adaptive Systems, a superintendent recalled a recent time when online communion was considered heretical. During the COVID pandemic, however, it became an accepted practice when everyone was isolated in their homes." He used this as an example of how disruption can help to normalize innovation that was once resisted. This reflection captured several aspects of CAS and demonstrated how he could lead in new ways as the church faces disruption today.

Project Findings

Analyzing the data described above, several themes emerged that resonated with superintendents and seemed to pique their interest. These themes led them to new ways of thinking about FXs and other innovative, contextual forms of church. Below, I present the four themes that were represented the most often in discussions, survey responses, and journal reflections.

One of the themes was experimentation. The idea of experimenting with new forms of church was present in each training session and was well represented in discussions and the survey responses. Superintendents explored the value of experimenting, allowing extended periods for experiments to develop, and creating an atmosphere where failure is acceptable. An example was provided of Lydia's Place, a women's shelter, that did not develop in the order it was designed, but over the course of three years, is now poised to meet all of its original goals. This demonstrates that the attitude of the participants became more open to FXs as experiments of a future church.

Another theme from the data was the superintendent's role as interpreter to address the general church's resistance toward something new. Participants realized that part of their responsibility was to help the general church understand the larger church and vice versa. This was reflected in each training session, and superintendents embraced this idea in discussions and surveys. Several superintendents cited Barnabas's example of supporting a new form of church as most helpful. This demonstrated a change in affect in the participants to be more open to new forms of church and more cognizant of resistance from what one participant called "the old guard." Participants indicated an increased desire to work with the general church to create a permission-giving environment for these new forms of church to succeed.

A third important theme that emerged from the data was the idea of disruption and the work of the Holy Spirit. Disruption was a consistent theme in each of the training sessions. The idea was introduced in the first session, with the persecution of Stephen being a significant disruption of the emerging church. Superintendents quickly acknowledged the presence of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles and Barnabas's role in relaying this to the church. The conversation around disruption was also prevalent in the CAS discussion, where participants assimilated this knowledge into their current context and discussed how the pandemic and time of church disaffiliations were disruptions in which they could see the Holy Spirit blessing new initiatives. Superintendents indicated a new openness to looking for how the Holy Spirit works in disruptions, and to advocate for these new places where the Spirit is at work.

The idea of Connection was the fourth-most prevalent theme throughout the project. Connection is a core tenet of Wesleyan Theology, so in one way, this was no

surprise. The reflections, however, signaled a changing attitude in the superintendent's role for fostering and strengthening connections. The survey results indicated that they felt like they needed to spend more time working with FXs than before. They imagined themselves providing direct leadership to FXs rather than passive leadership.

Two themes also emerged that were not included in the training and would be beneficial to include in future trainings. One of these was the idea of financial sustainability of innovative, contextual forms of church. The superintendents of this study had experience with elders leading innovative, contextual forms of church called Emerging Communities, which tend to be made up of smaller groups of people who do not significantly support the church financially (if at all). Elders in this context have are expensive to put in the field, and FXs cannot financially sustain them. Superintendents and Emerging Community Pastors have struggled to make their ministries economically sustainable.

If I were to offer this training again, I would include ways to begin and support contextual forms of church that can be financially sustainable. The question of sustainability hindered superintendents from fully embracing FXs. Teaching a more lay-led approach to FXs may be helpful. For example, the church in Antioch was a lay-led movement that supported itself and quickly grew to the point where it supported the general church. Another way to approach sustainability is through networking. The future of the church will likely rely more on networking for church growth. One elder may supervise five churches and three associate pastors, some of whom may be part-time local pastors. These pastors would rotate responsibilities and could provide pastoral oversight to FXs and other forms of church in addition to traditional or inherited forms of church.

Another aspect that I would include in future training would be a basic introduction to FXs. FXs are not new to our conference, and I assumed that the leaders who participated in this study would have a basic understanding. The survey responses and discussion demonstrated that this was not the case. Even for those who were somewhat familiar with FXs, a basic introduction would have provided a shared language to use in discussion.

In addition to including these two aspects, a third change that I would make if I were to conduct this project with superintendents again is that I would not offer it in the first part of the year. The beginning of the year is when superintendents are busy with cabinet meetings and consultations with churches and pastors about appointments. It was very difficult to find times when we could all meet, and seeing as I was serving as a superintendent at the same time, I felt guilty asking them to give more of their time to my project. For anyone considering studies with superintendents, the fall is a much better time for this kind of project. Charge Conferences tend to dominate superintendents' calendars in the fall, but those tend to happen in the evenings or on Sundays. It may be easier to schedule meetings during the week in the fall.

Conclusion

The problem that this project attempted to address was that judicatory leaders often unintentionally hinder innovative, contextual forms of church like FXs. From the research, I hypothesized that training could positively change the way superintendents felt about contextual forms of church so that they could be permission-givers and encouragers of these innovative ministry contexts. My project consisted of conducting

this training and gathering evidence through discussions, surveys, and journaling. The data shows that the training did, in fact, create a positive, affectual change in superintendents.

As observed in the evidence above, participants engaged the material well. The discussions were lively and productive. The body language and tone of conversation was positive and energetic, and this built as the conversation continued. It was fascinating to watch superintendents go from generalizations to visualize how they believed they could personally engage FXs in new ways. The superintendents, in an anonymous survey expressed positive feedback for the training and no negative feedback. They unanimously felt the training was helpful for them in their leadership role in FXs.

The topics of the training and ensuing discussion showed a positive, affective change. Superintendents used language in discussions and surveys that demonstrated that they personalized their role with biblical authority. They could see how their interactions with new forms of church followed the example of Barnabas. They also learned from early Methodist conflicts in field and tent preaching, and positively identified their role as permission-givers in the presence of resistance from the existing church. One superintendent expressed relief in the missiological training to know that superintendents were responsible for holding FXs spiritually accountable while balancing the tension of adapting to a specific context. This contrasted with what he felt before, that FXs were too secular and did not bear fruit. The CAS training and discussion helped superintendents understand how to provide leadership to FXs and how they play an important role in an adapting system. This affective change was demonstrated especially in the survey where

participants indicated that FXs deserved significantly more of their time and attention than before.

The data clearly shows an affectual change occurred among superintendents. Through the training and discussions, they became more comfortable with their leadership role and expressed a desire to be more permission-giving and encouraging than they were before the project. I look forward to further developing this training for leaders to help more leaders follow Barnabas's example of being permission-givers and encouragers of emerging forms of church.

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